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THE QUEST TO IMPROVE LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT: A TEACHER-
DEVELOPED LITERACY UNIT INCORPORATING A HYBRID-INSTRUCTIONAL
APPROACH

by

Dina L. Crislip

Bachelor of Science
Appalachian State University, 1989

Master of Education
Lesley University, 2003

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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College of Education

University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Leigh D'Amico, Major Professor

Rhonda Jeffries, Committee Member

Jin Liu, Committee Member

Linda Silvernail, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to God, my family, and friends. First, nothing can happen in this world without God making us all realize our strengths and weaknesses. He gives us the belief in ourselves, if we let him. To my husband, Brian who loved me through the good, the bad, and certainly the ugly. I cannot thank him enough for his relentless love and ability to rescue me when I couldn't endure anymore glucose burning! Next, to my mom and dad who inspired me to always persevere through adversity, and for instilling in me that nothing worthwhile ever comes easy. Most of all, I dedicate this work to my dear brother Gregory Lane Beadle, and my father, Robert Eugene Beadle who had to battle cancer during this three-year endeavor. I can still feel their spirit around me, and I am certain they are smiling down upon me! Thank you, Dad for always believing in me and whispering from heaven above to "keep going!"

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Abstract

This Dissertation in Practice (DiP) utilizes action research methods to answer a research question that focuses on teachers being empowered to make personal choices when delivering best practices to positively impact student achievement within PAWS Elementary School. Chapter One provides the rationale behind the origin of the presented research, in which the Problem of Practice poses the question of how personal decision-making by teachers is an integral attribute to the success and achievement of all learners within the public-school setting. This acknowledgment of the problem of practice was the impetus to the proposed research question: How does the teacher's personal decisions when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement? This study warrants the methodical design(s) outlined through Mertler's (2017) action research paradigm and seeks to effectively answer the researcher's question. These data collection practices include a mixed-methods design of qualitative and quantitative data collections incorporating all four phases of the action research process—*planning, acting, developing, and reflecting* (Mertler, 2017).

Keywords: empowerment, self-efficacy, autonomy, researched-based practices, hybrid-instructional approach.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For the last ten years, my role as an elementary level teacher has been augmented by curriculum and instruction dictated by superior powers within my school and district. When I first noticed that teachers were losing their power in making instructional decisions for students, I wanted to explore more ways to be an effective teacher using my own strategies and ideas to improve student achievement.

Over the past decade, our school system has implemented the latest and greatest programs and initiatives which are advertised as being most effective in increasing student achievement. However, are district leaders considering the importance of teachers' decision-making in our classrooms, like they once did?

Why are teachers not consulted more regarding the practices they execute daily? In 1938, John Dewey delineated "that teachers were responsible in understanding the needs of the students and should avoid the practice(s) that had been working with previous students, since their educative knowledge and experiences were of another time, in another place" (Dewey, 1938, p. 46). Furthermore, it is not enough for students to be under the mandates of predetermined education materials and assessments that are regarded effective for the sake of quantifying student achievement. In other words, the learning should be meaningful and engaging for all learners. "Everything depends upon the quality of the experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). My quest as an educator is to be an

effective teacher who yields student success. Classroom teachers can deliver best practices if given the *freedom* in choosing and making instructional decisions. As an action researcher within my second-grade classroom, this study investigates the nature of instructional decisions when implementing best practices in teaching literacy skills.

The decisions made impacts student achievement as well as student attitudes. In action research, the emphasis is on the teacher's approach in executing a study that is within the context of a school situation, and with the view to improve the quality of that situation (Mertler, 2017, p. 13). The action research within this study serves as a vehicle to improve my own practice in the teaching of literacy skills. This study may produce outcomes to illuminate the effects that can occur when teachers have autonomy in developing and implementing curriculum and instruction using a hybrid instructional approach that includes whole group and small group instruction. This is related to rekindling the need for teacher empowerment by allowing teachers to make their own personal decisions when delivering literacy instruction.

Statement of Problem

The problem of practice for my Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is to explore the effectiveness of a teacher-developed literacy curriculum unit, employing a hybrid instructional approach on student engagement and achievement. When teachers have autonomy in choosing literacy skills, student achievement is more likely to improve as the teacher can customize or approach instruction that is best matched to students' instructional needs. It is the teacher who is the expert with her students, and by combining explicit and small group instructional strategies, student literacy skills are enhanced. The teacher has a unique skill set, because she understands each child's needs;

and makes decisions through the hybrid-approach that can benefit students' comprehension.

At my public elementary school, located in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, teachers are beginning to convey apprehension when they are forced into utilizing only the district mandated curriculum and initiatives. As a teacher, I am concerned that high-stakes testing coupled with district curriculum demands have overridden the student-teacher relationship and the teachers' ability to develop and adapt curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of students. Fellow colleagues and I constantly express concerns that [we] are no longer encouraged to implement our own pedagogical skill sets which are tailored to the individual needs of the students we serve. Teachers were once trusted in implementing strategies that they deemed important; however, they are now required to rely on the 'assertion' from outsiders, who stand as onlookers. Although, these educators and consultants may have sincere intentions; they are not the experts. The classroom teacher is the expert; she has the closest relationship with the children.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this action research study is to empower myself as the action researcher in developing and implementing a literacy curriculum unit. Teachers, including me, are feeling frustrated and less empowered, because they are forced to deliver a "one-size fits all" instructional curriculum for the sake of what policymakers view as 'consistency.' Teachers have the advantage of being on the *front lines*, since they observe the daily nuances of a unique group of learners. Yet, no two children are alike, no two classrooms are alike, and no two teachers are alike. Curriculum and instruction decisions should not be solely made by outsiders who have limited knowledge of the

students sitting in American classrooms. Classroom teaching, inherently, lends itself to the teacher morphing into the expert – she has the rapport with students and learns every nuance and idiosyncrasy. A teacher can observe, analyze, and implement an action plan when necessary. Therefore, teachers should have the freedom in making decisions when delivering literacy instruction.

Due to the natural relationship that emerges from a teacher-student relationship, Hargreaves (1998) found, that teachers changed their practice based on emotional ties with children. Moreover, Hargreaves (2001a) also found when teachers make emotional connections to learning, they ultimately raised student achievement as well as increased their empowerment. Classroom teachers have the irreplaceable capacity in shaping and modeling the distinctive characteristics that enhance an empathetic culture. In this action research study, I am the teacher-researcher, implementing a literacy-based curriculum unit using a hybrid approach, combination of direct instruction and small group instruction. As the teacher-researcher, I share these practices with fellow colleagues, parents, and stakeholders. The outcomes of my study provide fellow colleagues pedagogical tools that reinforce students' literacy comprehension. Parents also benefit in gaining the perspective that their child has been exposed to a curricula unit of study that encompassed deeper levels of comprehension. Stakeholders may acquire an interest of the study's results; these conclusions could be shared with other educators who are seeking to improve students' literacy skills.

Rationale and Significance of Study

In today's culture, the role of the American educator could not be more pertinent, yet the teaching profession faces myriad of educative challenges in the twenty-first

century. Since many decisions are descended from a “top-down” approach extending from state and district level requirements, as the researcher, I am motivated to discover the results when I enforce *my* own decisions in developing and implementing a literacy curriculum unit that I believe benefits student learning.

Bureaucracy and high-stakes testing threaten a teacher’s ability in making the best instructional decisions to foster student achievement. Teachers are under pressure to expediate their instruction, so they can meet testing deadlines. Squire and Kelly (2012) stated that “with this age of accountability, teachers are being held accountable for student achievement, but it is not understood how empowered teachers are to make instructional decisions and the extent to which their empowerment is related to student achievement” (p.20). Most teachers enter this profession with the hope and belief that they can make a difference in students’ lives. Few consider the enormous pressure of high-stakes testing, let alone how they will be “graded” based on student test scores.

Thomas Good (2010), an educational researcher for over forty years, delineates that teachers, do indeed impact student achievement. Unfortunately, once teachers administer high-stakes state assessments and then receive the results from these assessments, it is too late for teachers to be effective in addressing student achievement among that cohort of students.

According to Good (2010), “the reality is that state tests are used to evaluate teacher performance, rather than the students’ improvement” (p.34). The results of my study shed light on the importance of teachers being empowered in relying on their own professional repertoire and pedagogy in serving students. Teachers are expected to

constantly modify and adjust their skill sets to meet the everchanging societal issues/ills that are out of their control.

A Hybrid-Instructional Approach

Teachers use their professional judgment by combining instructional strategies such as direct instruction with small group instruction to meet the needs of students. Teachers impact student achievement in beneficial ways, even when students are taught in large-group settings; this direct instruction approach is viewed as only marginally effective. According to Good, the evidence is unequivocally there, “that direct instruction yields student achievement, and not conjured from assertion of others” (Good, cited in Marzano, p.43). When students are learning new knowledge, a direct instructional teaching approach is needed. Later, students can connect the newly learned concepts to the overall big ideas that empowers them as reflective thinkers. Wiggins and McTighe, (2008) assert “when students need to acquire specific knowledge, skill, and strategies, especially in the context of performance, direct instruction is in order” (p. 290).

By utilizing a hybrid instructional approach, students reap the benefits from both strategies. According to Marzano, (1991) students who actively engage in verbal exchanges about their learning increase their level of thinking. In small groups, the teacher has the role of engaging students to the task of reading, listening, writing, and then providing students time to discuss their learning. Donald Graves (2001) also noted in an interview with Joy Turner, the benefits when teachers learn right alongside with their students. According to Graves, “when teachers allow students time for discourse, students are engaged in their learning” (p 28). Moreover, teachers make ‘on the spot’ decisions based on students’ needs. For instance, in a small group, teachers can guide and assist

students with their writing: having students read their writing aloud, making necessary revisions, discussing the topic and details, understanding point of view, and considering their audience. These are only a few of the multi-faceted components that are part of a small group, but an engaged teacher can and will provide spontaneous feedback which can lead to higher levels of student motivation and student achievement.

Research Question

To examine the potential effects of the teacher's autonomy when making personal decisions in delivering literacy instruction through a hybrid approach that expands upon the district mandated curriculum, I will inquire with the following research question:

How does the teacher's personal decisions when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom?

Theoretical Framework

The modern view of literacy proficiency is a multi-faceted paradigm; school professionals must implement practices that foster the reader's ability in understanding text. Our students are to engage in literacy skills that are constructive, integrative, and comprised of critical thinking skills that can relate to a sociocultural context. For instance, readers must do more than sound out words and make meaning from the text; readers bring their own assumptions and experiences to the task. We all have our own philosophies of what we think will work best for our students.

In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) posed two distinct problems within each philosophy—traditional vs. progressivism; each philosophy had its own, unique shortcomings. For instance, with traditional philosophy, Dewey purports, "The main

purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information” (Dewey, 1938, p. 18). Dewey stated, teaching “With books, especially textbooks are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which pupils are into effective connection with the material. Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced” (Dewey, 1938, p.18). Dewey asserts here that the learner is a passive learner held within the confines of a traditional approach. The student passively absorbed information from the lecture, taught by rote memorization of information, and read an exorbitant number of textbooks. These practices did not fully influence or encourage the young learner’s experience, thus improving the direction of his or her future contribution(s) to society.

In contrast, the progressive philosophy had its own set of imperfections. For instance, Dewey argued that the implementation of ‘mere’ freedom through the progressive philosophy posed threats to the learner’s experience. “What does freedom mean and what are the conditions under which it is capable of realization” (Dewey, 1938, p. 22)? Again, Dewey asks the question, “What is the role of the teacher and the materials (books) in fostering the learner’s experience?” Dewey affirms teachers and schools cannot dismiss one philosophy entirely and then embrace another without close examination. For example, students in the traditional setting did, indeed, have experiences which later impacted their lives positively. However, Dewey asserts, when considering progressive education, “Everything depends upon the quality of the experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 27).

The teacher will make his or her greatest impact on the learner and that is by engaging the student with learning experiences that meet the present goals, but also extend beyond to future experiences. After reading Dewey's *Experience and Education*, it occurred to me how teachers' personal experiences and the decisions they make may impact our modern-day students' experiences and improve literacy achievement.

What We Now Know

Of course, the twenty-first century is of a very different time and place compared to Dewey's era, however, to some extent, the same basic tenets apply when teaching students and improving their learning. Over the past 30 years, teaching literacy has transformed based on our understanding of literacy development. Literacy involves the skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing and they are recursive in nature (Pearson & Tierney, as cited in Frankel, 1984).

Today, reading has a social, cultural, and historical context that invites the learner to react to themes and determines how they comprehend text. The reader is also brought to the task of how he/she perceives and understands his or her world. Being literate is more than just being able to read and write well, thus holding proficient status. Literacy entails a societal aspect that includes consideration with the understanding of other perspectives, authentic learning experiences, building upon learners' linguistic and literary repertoires that extends their thinking (Larson & Marsh, 2015).

How students and teachers involve themselves in literacy is of great complexity. Hence, from the days (1985) of the *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, (BNR) the authors note a narrative that was commonly used among schools, "learning to read" and "reading to learn" created some problems. Teaching reading in these general terms does not lend

readers to cope with the demands of other disciplinary texts as the learners' progress through their school years (Pearson & Cervetti, 2013).

Finally, the multimodalities that exist beyond the printed word make profound enhancements as well as hindrances to our modern literacy world. Multimodal texts bring another set of difficulties to the learner. For instance, the adjoining of modes (gestures, sounds, images) that are conveyed in one manner, can differ in meaning as opposed to if they appeared from regular printed text (Frankel, 2016). Because literacy practices are also in a time of rapid change, the way in which learners' construct meaning by reading text in a variety of modalities compels us to rethink how students construct meaning. Teachers have an enormous task in being resourceful and intuitive as they plan instruction and choose meaningful and engaging texts. A hybrid-approach can deliver specific strategies that strengthen students' literacy skills.

The Need for Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy is a concept being discussed in school reform across all areas in public education. There are numerous teachers expressing concern that they are left out of the decisions regarding student achievement. In a research study, Wynne (2001) indicated that the "goal of teacher empowerment is to improve student achievement" (p. 28).

When teachers feel empowered in delivering best practices, student achievement is the result. A group of researchers from North Carolina believed in this concept. These educators wanted to create an opportunity that opened conversation among legislators and teachers. Their research attempted to, "initiate the dialogue between state decision

makers in improving teachers' working conditions" (Dagenhart, O'Conner, Petty, & Day, 2005, p. 108).

Over the past two decades, teachers have experienced less control in making decisions within their classrooms. Teachers have revealed a love and passion for being in the classroom and teaching students, despite the pressure from curriculum demands and mandates imposed upon them for high stakes assessments, national standards, and teacher quality initiatives.

In one study, "professors and doctoral students from the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill surveyed a large teacher population within their state" (Dagenhart et al., 2005, p.110). The 748 respondents (teachers) out of 1,650 surveyed responded to a Likert Scale, asking what impacted their job satisfaction views and professional success the most. The research results showed that teachers valued and needed: (1) more planning time; (2) support and respect as a professional; (3) adequate materials and supplies; (4) administrative support and leadership; and (5) time and financial support for professional development and study (Dagenhart, et al. 2005, p. 108). These professors were active educators as well as National Board-Certified teachers who systematically engaged in research that involved surveying the attitudes among fellow elementary, middle school, and high school level teachers with a range in their years of experience. The professors revealed that the research data could serve to initiate an open dialogue between teachers and decision makers to improve teachers' working environment, (Dagenhart et al., 2005, p.110). Teacher respondents were vocal in conveying a need for administrators to embrace the idea that teachers wanted more control over the curriculum, instructional methods, topics, and time. The data from the

surveys further revealed that teachers “felt they should pursue their own professional development, which included pursuing college courses or advanced degrees, conferences, workshops, and training in new techniques” (p. 111).

Additional studies indicate the need for teacher empowerment, where teachers can make the necessary decisions that align with students’ needs and impact student achievement. A small study, conducted by (Jenkins, 2001) investigated three teachers and nine students. The teachers participated in intensive professional learning with reading instruction; the use of this teaching/learning cycle in reading instruction would influence decision making and student achievement. “By collecting baseline data from running records, teacher observations, and writing samples within the study, seven out of the nine students exhibited significant improvement; the average reading gain was two levels, which is equivalent to half of the academic year” (p. 281). Teachers relied on their own professional knowledge in making decisions, and the results showed a positive correlation between teacher decision-making and improved student achievement. The results from the study indicated that when teachers were able to make changes in their practice, the teacher/student relationship was a positive impact and students improved (Jenkins, 2001). Furthermore, “a study conducted with 100 participants by Klecker and Loadman (1998a); and Sweetland and Hoy (2000) also concurred with Jenkins in that there was a correlation between teachers who have the highest involvement in the decision-making process and their perception that empowerment is beneficial” (White, 1992, as cited in Squire-Kelly, p. 31).

Design of the Study

My study was executed by utilizing an action research methodology as opposed to

traditional research methods. “Traditional research is typically conducted by researchers who are somewhat removed from the environment they are studying” (Mertler, 2017, p. 7). With this type of research, the researchers practice a more objective analysis utilizing the scientific method in seeking answers via a deductive approach with quantitative analyses. Through traditional research methods, a researcher may also use the inductive reasoning approach and collect qualitative data. In this “bottom-up” approach, the researcher begins with observations, and collecting data, then forms hypotheses (Mertler, 2017).

In contrast, Mertler (2017) explains a practical approach to executing practical research within the classroom or school setting. Schmuck (1997) defines action research as an attempt to study a real school situation with a view to improve the quality of the actions and results within it. Action research is on-site research conducted by the teacher/educator who is interested and vested in gathering information, so he or she can carry out an investigation and apply the improved practices in the classroom in a timely fashion. (McMillan, 2004). With action research, teachers are reflective about their teaching and they are seeking ways to improve their practice, provide meaningful learning experiences for their students, and subsequently, empowering themselves.

By engaging in this action research study, I have the opportunity to implement change more effectively and grow alongside with my students. I continue to be more reflective as I research the variances among the study on which I am to embark. These observations will enable me to critically examine my own practice during the research and give me the opportunity to hone my teaching repertoire.

Action research serves as the best methodology, and I hope to gain better insight into my practice. As Mertler (2017) asserts, “most educators are consistent in looking for ways to improve their practice, and that is the very nature of their profession” (p. 43). In this context of a self-study, my position as the researcher is founded upon the premise that the study is implemented with me acting as the participant observer--the insider.

However, Herr & Anderson (2005) claim that the participant observer will face a myriad of difficulties. One challenge was that the fluid nature of the study forced me as the insider to reevaluate my steps when observing and collecting data while keeping the research truthful. The insider positionality lends itself to an “additional set of eyes” that aids me as the researcher when observing and collecting data. According to Herr & Anderson, these *critical friends* can aid as observers and reinforce the trustworthiness of the study.

Glossary of Key Terms

Teacher empowerment: defined by Short (1994) as a “process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth... empowerment encompasses six dimensions: decision -making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, and autonomy.”

Autonomy: Autonomy refers to teachers having control over the decisions they make within the classroom (Short, 1994).

Impact: Impact refers to the teacher’s need to have an influence on the teaching and learning process (Short, 1994).

Research-based practices: A paradigm that has thirteen interlocking principles, assumptions, or theories that characterize the model of education. These principles are interrelated and each one influences the other (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005)

Self-efficacy: Refers to the teachers' perception that they are equipped with the skills and ability to help students learn (Bogler, 2004).

Hybrid approach: a combination of whole class instruction and small group instruction when teaching literacy skills.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The theoretical framework of this study refers to the work of John Dewey and emphasizes that the modern teacher can learn from the research and experiences John Dewey delineated when exploring two distinct philosophies. Chapter two provides the theoretical framework that encompasses the research studies and perspectives posed by Thomas Good, Donald Graves, and Robert Marzano. Their years in educational research demonstrate evidence showing the importance of how teachers' decisions impact student achievement, thus supporting the reasons and quest in conducting this research study. Chapter three discusses the action research methodology that will be implemented. The chapter highlights the population and size of the sample used in the study. In addition, the chapter describes the mixed-methods paradigm in conjunction with an explanation of the pretest/posttest design used within this study, as well as qualitative research methods. Chapter four of this study reports the data findings and connect the results to the identified PoP. Finally, Chapter five expounds upon the conclusions and the evidences of teacher empowerment and decision-making that impacts student literacy skills through a hybrid instructional approach.

Summary

My problem of practice seeks to initiate a “practitioner-research based paradigm known as action research” (Mertler, 2017, p. 3). The study answered my wondering(s) and indicated positive impacts in student learning. I embarked on my quest in examining the related literature, implementing the experiment, and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. From there, I share the results among my colleagues, parents, and stakeholders. As Johnson states, “sharing the results from action research is crucial; that even colleagues within your building would be most appreciative of learning the results” (Johnson, 2008, as cited in Mertler, p. 43, 2017). These results can be shared also with other colleagues and the public in more formal settings, ranging from faculty meetings, professional conferences, and even publishing the study in an academic journal.

The cyclical nature of the action research allows for every practitioner- researcher to be responsible and intuitive with the decisions she makes. As an action researcher in my classroom I will continue to be more reflective as I research the variances among the study on which I am to embark. My chief goal as the action researcher is to discover how a teacher-developed literacy unit based on professional expertise and knowledge of students creates meaningful experiences for my second graders—skills taught in isolation are not effective. Mertler (2017) posits, “instead of waiting for things to filter down from education research or the state department, take the lead in finding ways to do my work better and more effectively” (p. 276).

My research sought to examine the impact that my decisions made on my students’ learning when I developed and implemented a literacy unit using a hybrid instructional approach. This inquiry called for an answer to the action research question:

How does student achievement improve through the implementation of a teacher-developed hybrid instructional approach? The results of this study have been beneficial and shed light on the way a teacher's decision-making can impact student learning when implementing a specific pedagogy skill set such as the hybrid-instructional approach.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Teachers often reflect upon pedagogy and how their decisions when implementing literacy instruction for young students can impact achievement. By the second semester in my classroom, I noticed that most of my second-grade students were reading fluently. Additionally, they were apt in phonemic awareness and adept at understanding basic comprehension. However, I noticed an emerging problem; students were not understanding deeper levels of literacy elements. After reviewing the summative assessments required by the district throughout the year, it occurred to me that their achievement data reflecting specific literary elements indicated that they had not mastered higher level literacy elements. For example, norm-referenced assessments, such as Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) are utilized as predictive assessments in relation to the SC College and Career Ready Standards in ELA beginning in third grade.

In my district, second grade students are expected to show academic growth on the MAP Assessment, which is administered three times per year. Due to Hurricane Florence delaying our school year, our second graders were administered the abbreviated MAP screening assessment (20 questions) in January of 2019. Half of my class this winter (2019) scored at the 52 percentile and under on the shortened version of MAP. According to my instructional coach, when my second graders are in third grade by spring of 2020, they will have to reach the 60th percentile or higher to be classified as

“Meets” on SC Ready. Moreover, some standards such as the SC ELA standard of cultural context as well as plot/character changing over time’ is tested in the beginning of third grade, but it is not assessed on MAP. Teachers are expected to provide instructional strategies that build those foundational literacy skills. Hence, teachers need to have autonomy and empowerment in shaping the instruction to develop student skills and mastery. This realization led me to the growing problem of students who lack literacy achievement when reading narrative texts as my Problem of Practice. This in turn, compelled me to examine my own teaching practice and the curriculum I utilized in my classroom. The purpose of this action research study is to examine a literacy curriculum developed by the practitioner researcher tailored to meet the diverse needs in my classroom. This theoretical framework assists me in navigating through the existing “one-size fits all” instructional curriculum, commercially made reading series that are not producing higher levels of student literacy achievement.

Research Question

To examine the potential effects of delivering literacy instruction through a blended approach, I posed the question:

How does the teacher’s personal decisions when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom?

This review includes the theoretical frameworks of social constructivism, sociocultural theories, and dialogic discourse theory. The remaining sections contain sociocultural perspectives of literacy; sociocultural literacy contextualized; historical perspectives; critique of American schooling; and addressing literacy practices of

underrepresentation of learners. The latter part of the review contains mandates and literacy achievement, obstacles in classroom teaching, scripted curricula, privatization, education reports, teacher decisions, constructivist influences in the 21st century; direct and small group instruction, and the need for standards-based instruction.

Purpose of the Literature Review

A successful literature review consists of current knowledge relating to a specific topic and argues how the knowledge leads the reviewer into conducting original research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). When an action researcher embarks upon an inquiry, the examiner is engaged in critically assessing the related literature and how it applies to the topic. Herr & Anderson (2004) state that the literature review orients the reader to the problem being studied, and it can illuminate current research.

When conducting a thorough literature review, educational databases and scholarly literature articles are gathered and assessed by the researcher to develop an understanding of what past and current research reveals. The literature review follows a progression of broadly related studies narrowed down to the specific related study (Mertler, 2017). An extensive search for related literature was obtained from the Thomas Cooper Library, Interlibrary Loan Department, related peer-reviewed research studies, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, seminal works, and professional education books. After analysis of specific literature relating to the field of study, an additional examination supports the need for further research of the relationship between small/whole group instruction through a standards-based approach in the goal to improve literacy skills within a second-grade classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Progressivism promotes the ideals of a democratic society that transcends into today's field of education and all people have the opportunity in benefiting from a well-crafted educational experience (Fesmire, 2016; Kliebard, 1995; Schiro, 2013). The theoretical framework that grounds this action research study is based under the theories of progressivism, social constructivism, and sociocultural theory.

The prominent theory that frames this dissertation contains the underpinnings of sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory builds on the base of Vygotsky's (1980) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with the support of a more knowledgeable tutor. Hodges, Feng, Kuo, and McTighe, (2016) define sociocultural theory as having the focus on social and concrete aspects of learning with reading and writing serving as modes of social collaboration and cognitive processing.

Sociocultural Theory

Classrooms are filled with social beings and learning is acquired by a scope of literacy instruction. Social constructivist theory was founded by Lev Vygotsky (1978) when he developed the sociocultural approach to cognitive development. The theory is based upon social interaction and is considered an essential part of learning (Black and Allen, 2018). Social constructivism was formed after Piaget had described his theories of cognitive constructivism. Understanding the child's developmental levels also help teachers with selecting appropriate learning objectives. Students need guidance when teachers are explaining complex topics and understanding the developmental stages of learners is critical in a classroom (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

According to Black and Allen (2018), the learner's personal and critical thinking such as dialogic thought, language development, zone of proximal development (ZPD) culture, and internal speech comprise this theory. The foundational role associated with social constructivism is that the community plays a central role in the process of making meaning (McLeod, 2014). Another important aspect of sociocultural theory is that students are taught argumentative skills; argumentation is a skill that must be learned and practiced (Black & Allen, 2018). Furthermore, in the context of literacy, social constructivism acknowledges both personal and social contributions to learning with a skillful instructor (McLeod, 2014). Reading is a combination of the reader using text and drawing upon prior knowledge, and the ability to make inferences. When teachers enable students to engage in social interaction, classroom teaching is more effective. The psychological tools including verbal language and written expression enable the individuals of a group to share information among other group members (Perry, 2012). These tools encourage connections to be made with other cultural groups who may hold different schema about similar ideas (McLeod, 2014).).

Vygotsky (1978), a foundational theorist of sociocultural theory, believed that there are psychological tools that the child brings to the learning. Since language is utilized as a cultural tool, learners construct meaning and enhance cognitive behavior; the learner acquires more effective strategies when interacting with situations, which evolve in the sociocultural community (Petrova, 2013). Thus, these 'cultural tools' under the Vygotsky theory empower learners because of the relationship between language and the psychological development of the learner when learners engage in social interaction (Perry, 2012; Petrova, 2013; Powell, et.al; Black & Allen, 2018; & Padmanabha, 2018).

Sociocultural theory focuses on the procedure of applying social interaction with an emphasis on instruction that is mediated through a collaborative approach (Hodges, et.al, 2016). These foundational theories and practices provide the framework in support of further research needed to improve literacy achievement among all learners.

Sociocultural Perspectives of Literacy

Sociocultural constructivism includes perceptions of learning that are socially facilitated through language (Lazar, 2012). Learning occurs through the mastery of internalization of social interactions among one's cultural environment (Black & Allen, 2018). Progressivists envision an egalitarian, unrestricted school system in which all students, no matter, race, color, gender, or creed can enjoy a free and public education.

Dewey believed that literacy was a direct connection to the occupations that served not only his curriculum theory, but it permeated into his vision of an ideal society (as cited in Kliebard, 1995). Many students today are living in poverty and grow up in homes with language other than English. Furthermore, these marginalized students often are not living in areas where schools provide them with the support that they need to gain in academic achievement (Kozol, 2005). Regardless of a child's zip code, teachers who are adept in literacy instruction are attuned to each child's literacy potential, and they need to consider the social-historical factors that have shaped their students' access to literacy instruction (Perry, 2012).

Students who struggle in school and English language learners benefit from an environment that is rich in socially situated practices. Mercer (2013) asserts that the quality of children's language experience in the early years is a good predictor of their educational achievement. For example, Lenters and Winters (2013) investigated a fifth-

grade classroom that employed a multimodal literacy approach along with conventional language arts practices. The modalities included print, performing arts, and digital technologies that were interwoven throughout a five-week period. The learning activities were (performing mini skits) and storytelling, followed by students receiving feedback from teachers and peers. Students were then asked to rewrite events of the fairy tales. The samples of written drafts revealed greater depth, cohesion, and higher -level vocabulary was evident (Lenters & Winters, 2013). This small sample connects the underpinnings of a social cultural theory utilized in a classroom that focuses on language acquisition. Through the social cultural lens using semiotic tools, that include written expression, social collaboration, literature-based written responses, and authentic activities aligned with literacy standards, teachers can create a rich and meaningful learning environment. These types of pedagogical practices lend themselves well to improving literacy achievement among diverse groups of learners and further study is necessary.

Sociocultural literacy contextualized. Literacy in a socially contextualized practice helps us to connect with other diverse communities (Perry, 2012). The sociocultural theory is malleable in terms of how students utilize texts in real-world situations. Lazar (2012) asserts that “All learning occurs when people engage in activities within and across settings, and these settings have particular social organizations and histories” (p. 67). Mercer (2013) asserts that the “role of language and learning can be contributed to what he calls the “social brain” basing this claim that human intelligence is essentially social and cultural, and that the relationship between social activity and individual thinking underpins cognitive development” (p. 153).

Most learning takes place in a setting that fosters engagement with purposeful learning goals where students find that their identity has value. Purcell-Gates (2003) advocates for educators to incorporate authentic literacy activities because when teachers utilize real-world texts for real-world purposes, learning is extended beyond the classroom. Furthermore, because language is present in all academic subjects, the use of specialized discourses is considered a cultural tool in various learning goals (Mercer, 2013).

In a study that examined the development of metacognition and self-regulation of learners, Mercer followed first year teachers implementing an intervention called, Thinking Together. The study examined six primary school teachers and their classes by studying the relationship between children using language as a tool, raising their self-regulation/metacognitive abilities, and compared them with children who relied on individual tasks. Results indicated classes that received the intervention demonstrated better discussion of problems with statistically significant results over the control group who did not receive the intervention. In addition, Mercer (2013) asserts that “they were able to explain their reasoning to a researcher more explicitly when doing a music-related and science-related task” (p. 162). The results exhibited how students use interpreting skills and negotiating when solving problems by “mediating new knowledge at the cultural level” (p.163).

Although, the sociocultural theory has promising facets that are attributable to collective classroom learning, teachers must be cognizant of the students who struggle with learning. An article by Perry (2012) supports this by explaining that the sociocultural theory has some limitations in the school setting. For example, students who

have low levels of literacy may exhibit difficulty with reading because school literary practices do not align well with student cultural values. This paradigm may not align with the cultural contexts that are value-laden with literacy practices taught in contemporary schooling, and there could be detrimental consequences for learners who may have cognitive learning problems. Teachers who instruct these learners will encounter a challenge with implementing instructional practices that meet their needs.

Dialogic discourse. Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogic discourse is underpinned with Vygotskian principles. Bakhtin (1986) theorized that "when participants engage in dialogue, the utterances spoken are woven together through the thoughts and anticipations of others" (Pennell, 2015, p. 253). In other words, when the learner perceives and understands speech from others, he takes an active response towards it by negotiating meaning and preparing a response (Mercer, 2013). In dialogic classrooms, learning is student focused as learners engage in the critical thinking of texts and mediate understanding through discussions. The ability to think critically is an important comprehension skill in learning, and it is possible to teach constructivist strategies within classrooms. There are rigorous literacy standards that require different approaches to supporting students in becoming critical readers. One aspect of improving students' literacy skills is utilizing practices that develop learners' language skills (Petrova, 2013). These language skills are connected to dialogic discourse, and culturally organized activities are necessary in a classroom and moving students along the continuum requires the scaffolding from more capable peers and teachers in helping learners acquire new knowledge (Lazar, 2012).

For example, a 1985 report *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* presented a study by Frankel, Becker, Rowe, and Pearson (2016) which argued that children are ineffective at drawing upon their prior knowledge, especially children who are living in marginal communities. The authors describe the conceptualization of how students and teachers participate in literacy practices. This includes how teachers teach and how students learn. Within this conceptualization, there are five principles: (a) literacy is constructive, integrative, and critical process situated in social practices, (b) fluent reading is shaped by language processes and contexts, (c) literacy is strategic, (d) literacy entails motivation, and (e) literacy is a continuously developing set of practices. These principles are very much relevant today; however, there are new developments in the field, such as the importance of extending this definition to the sociocultural constructed literacy practices. The inclusion of power, beliefs, and values relating to language, ethnicity, gender, economic, and religion are factors that have brought sociocultural literacy to the forefront (Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Stouffer, 2016).

A study conducted by Pennell (2013) delineated the effects of when dialogic discourse is implemented within the classroom. Pennell, (2013) examined students who were exposed to philosophical inquiry to promote open-ended discussions with peers. The theory outlines when children use language to articulate and defend their thoughts, they have a higher tendency to engage in critical thinking. Pennell's (2013) investigation of four third graders who were labeled as having difficulty with higher-order thinking skills were observed. The author utilized literary texts pertaining to a story plot and how the characters' actions changed throughout the plot. Throughout the intervention, students

were engaged in the discourse and they utilized their experiential knowledge in making meaning from texts. Over a four-month period, the researcher met with the students for 35 minutes and employed the dialogic discourse intervention. From the interview findings, the students engaged in more exploratory talk and asked questions rooted in the philosophical wonderings. Results from the posttests revealed that implicit comprehension improved but needed remediation. It was also revealed that the pre- and posttests suggested a “shifting epistemology underpinning discourse as they began to view discussions as a tool to construct knowledge” (Pennell, 2013, p. 259). The research also showed that comprehension improved based on the Qualitative Reading Inventory, (QRI-V).

This research supports the hypothesis that dialogic discourse and philosophic inquiry can improve literacy comprehension. Pennell (2013) recommends that discourse can be implemented in a large group setting utilizing read aloud, followed by scaffolded written expression activities in small groups. In addition, Lazar (2012) states that read aloud based in a sociocultural context with some writing instruction supports language skills for English language learners. Vygotsky’s focus on zone of proximal development, a sociocultural perspective, and purposeful activities enable students to construct meaning. The research supports the hypothesis that dialogic discourse and philosophic inquiry can improve literacy comprehension.

Historical Perspectives

The historical perspectives that shape this action research study center around the philosophical perspectives of social constructivism, sociocultural theory, and dialogic

discourse theories and how they have evolved within American education including curriculum and instruction.

The works of past progressive philosophers, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1783), Maria Montessori (1897), John Dewey (1896), and Lev Vygotsky (1978) have made salient contributions to the constructivist approach that exist in today's curriculum practice. Some theorized curriculum ideologies and practices have stood the test of time, while others have waned. The curriculum being practiced in American schools today have elements of progressive ideology, but are they being implemented in ways that best serve students? The theoretical frameworks of my study are an intersection of progressivism and social constructivism, with an emphasis on the sociocultural perspective outlined by Lev Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Franklin Bobbit implemented the scientific engineering model to end the "wastefulness" of public schools. Traditional schools were made to function like factories: change the child (the raw material) into the finished product, the adult (Kliebard, 1995; Schiro, 2013). Bobbit argued, "It makes the educator's job to act as an agent of society and determine the needs of and the products that fulfill those needs" (p. 67). According to Kliebard (1995), Bobbit was inspired after the completion of his article, "The Elimination of Waste in Education."

Bobbit became a respected curriculum developer and began looking closely at models of efficiency. In an article he published in 1912, Bobbit's educational wheels were spinning when he met Gary, Indiana's school superintendent, Willard Wilt. Mr. Wilt, inspired by U.S. Steel Mill Corporation, had devised a "platoon system" of shuffling students from one classroom into other classroom in a methodical fashion.

Bobbit was impressed with the management and efficiency, and began using the word, “plant” to referring to a school. (Kliebald, 1995; Schiro, 2013). Bobbit’s curriculum was utilized so that the child could learn objectives (performances) well, so that he or she could maintain them for preparation of adult life. Schools in this era were engineered to be the primary agencies of social progress, and the education of youth was to elevate them to a higher level that impacts and sustains society. The Social Efficiency Ideology was primarily based on the country’s need to fulfill the mass production and flow of labor requirements needed for the industrial age, and schools were rapidly becoming the schooling factories.

The teachers under social efficiency functioned as managers; they were to ensure the learners engaged in the learning environments. Schiro (2013) posits, “The job of the teacher is to fit the student to the curriculum and fit the curriculum to the students” (p. 93). The schools began to implement what is in practice today, a qualitative and quantitative performance-based accountability to meet the curriculum standards. Teachers did not have, and still do not have, input into the curriculum making, nor are they invited to fully examine the idiosyncratic needs of their students. (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Pinar, 2005; Gagne, 1970, as cited in Schiro).

The Social Efficiency Ideology holds teachers and curriculum developers accountable by data-based decisions that drive the educational wheels and keeps teachers as the factory workers, producing the socially fit adult. Incidentally, the Social Efficiency pendulum is in perpetual motion, swinging from the latter part of the nineteenth century into the twenty-first century. Because this machine mass produces and aligns curriculum standards to be measured statistically, it has proven its practicality in keeping schools and

education accountable and maintains hereto the factory model (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

In identifying the foundational theories that have been inculcated, classroom teachers can ascertain the underpinnings these movements have had on how American curriculum has been implemented. Because of the work and struggles of previous intellectuals, educators today can appreciate the curriculum theories and models that have manifested in today's schools. When educators learn from the past, then implement new knowledge, they are empowered in making a difference for future thinkers – their students.

In a report drawn from Hodges, Feng, Kuo, and McTigue (2016), a systematic review of literacy theories revealed that there are current researchers in the field of education failing to accurately report literacy theories that assist teachers in making accurate decisions with effectively matching their interventions with student needs. It was recommended by the reviewers that teachers focus closely on the theoretical understandings that imply the best practices. Furthermore, specific to this review, it was determined that social theories were often confused and of those the socio-cognitive theory was confused with the sociocultural theory. Hodges et al. (2016) posits:

Sociocultural theory focuses on the procedure of social interaction, and socio-cognitive theory attends to the individuals' unique learning processes. Studies based on sociocultural theory mainly discussed instruction, which provided a collaborative approach. Students learned and improved from interaction with teachers and more knowledgeable peers. Studies that applied socio-cognitive theory focused on students' self-regulation and self-monitoring. Therefore, rather

than the whole class, students' cognitive development and improvement were emphasized. (p. 8, para. 4)

The influence of sociocultural theory is important to the teaching of reading and writing. According to the authors, over the past two decades the social theories, although slightly different have been influential in the teaching of literacy skills (Hayes, as cited in Hodges, 2016). In conclusion, the researchers contend that sometimes there's confusion among researchers and that teachers can help lessen those inaccuracies by providing feedback to researchers. Sociocultural theory builds Vygotsky's (1980) *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* and views reading and writing as modes of social collaboration and cognitive processing (Prior, as cited in Hodges, et al., 2016). Having a focused intention on student learning and achievement is a universal goal. However, recent critics state that school leadership among elementary and secondary schools has been inconsistent and lacking with the direct involvement of learning goals (Ingersoll, Dougherty, & Sirindes, 2017). The objective should be to include teachers in the direct decision-making when it pertains to student growth.

Critique of American Schooling

William Kliebard's (1995) historical account of American schools discusses the political and social issues of the early twentieth century. In the *Struggle for the American Curriculum*, he described the bureaucratic players who were associated with developing the American curriculum. These various interest groups aligned themselves with influential people who sought to promote their own agenda. In the early twentieth century, Dewey was aware that education reform failed; there were innovations introduced by others and new and exciting things were considered as better (Kliebard,

1995). Fast forward to the 21st century, in a conversation with Steve Jobs, a reporter for the *New York Times* noted Jobs as saying, “What’s wrong with schools cannot be fixed with technology” (Pinar, 2013, p. 30). Technology cannot replace the complex and fundamental role of teachers in determining appropriate and effective curriculum and instruction. The essentialist movement was fully immersed into the educational system which focused on standardization of curriculum, instruction, and assessment...The essentialist philosophy included the belief that teaching must be based on knowledge of evidence-based experience and emphasized a close relationship between research and teaching (Elgstrom and Hellstenius, 2011).

Constructivist influences in the 21st century. “The last forty years have focused on curriculum standards, assessment, and reporting mechanisms to share with the public” (Good, 2010, p. 46). Literacy practices have changed over the decades, and teachers need more practical and effective ways in meeting students’ needs. Literacy has evolved into a paradigm of social awareness and schools have the responsibility in creating spaces where learners are at the center of instruction and the involvement of students thinking in deeper levels of language processes remains a focus (Goodman, 2011). The American dream holds the ideal that everyone living in a democratic society can achieve a rich and meaningful education (Kliebard, 1995). Although education has transformed many lives, there are still obstacles that thwart educational goals and leaves inequities among many groups of people.

As educational leaders, policymakers, school professionals, and teachers move forward they must envision lasting change, and teachers must participate in collaboration for the good of the whole school, not just the classroom (Farris-Berg, Dirkswager, &

Junge, 2013). There are well-researched paradigms from renowned education researchers that share in the support of teacher autonomy and creativity (Good, 2010). Berry and Farris-Berg (2016) argue that teachers who engage in collaboratively designed teaching and learning goals keep students at the center of their decisions. Two Boston schools among 90 others spread across the country have piloted themselves to be teacher-empowered schools. Teacher teams in these schools have collective autonomy via governing boards and the superintendent. In addition, teachers are held accountable, but teachers are entrusted through collaboration in choosing *how* they meet the goals of their learners (Berry & Farris-Berg, 2016).

In another study conducted by Ronfeldt and colleagues (as cited in Berry & Farris-Berg, 2016) found that (included test score data and 9000 teacher observations) teachers who held perceptions of high levels of collaboration tended to be more effective in improving literacy achievement. Although the number of schools with teacher autonomy is small, when teachers collectively govern themselves and commit themselves to becoming change agents by keeping the perspectives of children in mind, then a shift in a school's culture will emerge and greater gains in student achievement are evident (Brubaker, 2014).

Government and Privatization

Historically, the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have been the overarching organizations in guiding the reading curriculum in our nation. The standards and guidelines outlined within these organizations are considered, “general in nature, subsequently they guide instruction and recommendations in the areas of writing, speaking, and listening skills”

(Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 2005, p. 42). During the early 1990s, the whole language movement was the leading method of teaching literacy skills. Consequently, the 1996 Reading Wars began, and an attack on whole language instruction was launched, claiming it was responsible for the plummeting reading scores as demonstrated on NAEP (Goodman, 2011).

In addition, Congress enacted the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development as well as the National Reading Panel which quickly produced a report that was parlayed into the writing of federal law, beginning with Clinton's administration, and then followed by Bush's administration of the NCLB. Moreover, Goodman (2011) asserts that the "attacks on whole language focus on the 'learner-centered practices as unscientific' and to muzzle the articulate voices of teachers, researchers, and teacher educators" (p. 23). In an editorial, education leader Diane Ravitch (2010) argued, "the development of the Common Core was funded almost entirely by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation... in 2009 President Obama launches the Race to the Top (RTTT), competition for billions of dollars in grant money" (NY opinion column). Most states were forced to adopt the "college and career ready standards, and these standards emphasize that students must learn to read complex texts, and teachers must find ways for students to read more challenging texts by the time they graduate high school to be college-career-ready," (Shanahan, 2014, p. 11). Given the demands of teaching, there will always be the involvement of government and educators must try to be informed in understanding how laws and policies affect students and themselves.

Mandates and literacy achievement. Research is now the major cornerstone of education, for it is considered as the pathway to improving literacy instruction (Purcell-

Gates, 2003). According to Long and Seldon (2011), all forms of policy are determined based on the decisions of where to allocate resources for specific purposes. When literacy policy is implemented into the schools based on the supposition that reading achievement needs to be improved, more resources are needed, and decisions are made on how reading achievement will be measured. Because the federal government has intervened by implementing laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2002, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) of 1996, and the newest addition of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, educators were to be given better support in teacher training and educational testing (Goodman, 2011 & US Department of Education, 2015). According to Shanahan (2014), the National Center for Educational Statistics (2009) revealed that national tests did not exhibit any progress in reading achievement. Since 1965, all states must comply with federally funded mandates (New America Foundation, 2013).

In research conducted by economists, “the teacher’s role is rendered important only insofar as it raises students’ scores on standardized tests (Pinar, 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, when California purchased the “English Language Arts Framework” (1987), followed by thirty other states, teachers were not allowed to write and implement their own instruction and were forced to follow the prescriptive instruction. However, instead of being the pathway to success they hoped for, “NAEP results revealed that reading achievement was at its lowest point since the assessment began” (p. 9). Mandates that are implemented to support teachers but do not allow for any innovation can have poorer student achievement. These events help support education researchers, policy

makers, schools, and teachers in deciding how instructional practices should be implemented when seeking the improvement of student achievement.

Literacy Instruction

When teaching literacy skills, there are additional tasks and components that learners need in meaning making. Some literacy skills require more strategies or techniques than others. A teacher must draw upon the best practices that she believes will ensure literacy comprehension. Every teacher will have a different perspective in what constitutes good literacy instruction. Some teachers will reflect upon what they have found that typically works well with students. Some teachers may employ practices that were similar in the way that they were taught. Some might implement a reading program that was required to be used in the classroom. Teachers are looking for answers. In a 1985 report *Becoming a Nation of Readers (BNR): The Report of the Commission on Reading* revealed the need to revise the definition of “literacy” due to the theoretical and empirical developments in recent years. The researchers, (Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Stouffer, cited in Frankel, 2016) argued that defining reading, “must go further by attending to the process that reading includes sociocultural constructed literacy practices, including the values, beliefs, and power relations that are socially situated” (p. 7). With these reasons expressly conveyed, it is easy to see the problematic nature of low literacy achievement in schools and why additional examination is warranted.

Addressing Literacy Practices for Underrepresented Learners

Schools work hard to meet the needs of all students, and research demonstrates that a social constructivist method supports English language learners (ELLs) as well as all learners. Gee (2004) asserts that U.S. schools have failed with non-elite populations

and have declined in the support of literacy skills for diverse learners. Woolfolk (2004) defines diversity as having the presence of different ethnic backgrounds combined with facets of identity and biological differences that give varied experiences and understanding to everyone.

In a social constructivist classroom, cooperative learning is a critical component in creating deeper understanding within a diverse classroom setting (Powell & Kalina, 2009). When students have opportunities to work with other students' perspectives while engaging in social interactions the more proficient the learning will become (Black & Allen, 2018). Furthermore, there is growing research that supports the sociocultural theory and practices when the arrangement of heterogenous groupings are implemented as they contribute to the depth and breadth of learning environments (Black & Allen, 2018). Petrova (2013) asserts that learners engaged in interactive problem solving by utilizing the semiotic tools of communication gives the learners an advantage when learning new concepts through collaboration.

According to Black & Allen (2018), the sociocultural view has important impacts on the education of diverse learners, as learners can benefit from heterogenous group settings within a classroom. When students are situated in heterogenous groups, diverse ideas are mediated through discourse which leads to better understanding (Black & Allen, 2018). Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez (2011) reported various outcomes from studies in relation to how English language learners excel in school. When English learners participated in mixed groupings, the cooperative activities gave them opportunities to discuss the content among peers. Researchers (Calderon, et.al) examined students in Texas who were transitioning from Spanish to English in grades two through four

compared to the control group of similar English learners implemented the Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (BCIRC) assessment. The students that were in the BCIRC had scored higher on both the English and Spanish reading assessments. These outcomes assist teachers in strategically implementing cooperative learning groupings that assist students in utilizing collaboration and engaging in higher-order thinking skills. The second study demonstrates that social interaction among peers often leads to cognitive learning.

In a longitudinal study, a research team (Ma et al., 2017) evaluated two instructional approaches with the influence of storytelling among 210 fifth grade ELLs from schools serving in low -income neighborhoods. Collaborative grouping and direct instruction were the designated approaches implemented within the study for a six-week period. The significant finding was that the fifth-grade Spanish speaking ELLs who participated in the collaborative groups told more elaborate and coherent stories than the group receiving direct instruction (Ma et al., 2017). The students in the collaborative groups could articulate story elements, causal chains connecting to story elements, and could elaborate with more detail regarding specific themes presented in the stories. In addition, the team explained their hypothesis of the group of children who received direct instruction were asked facts of the story without any discussion. Students in the collaborative groups were required to explain and justify their reasoning among peers.

These research studies demonstrate that collaboration among peers with dialogic discourse improves comprehension and that this instructional approach fosters academic learning among English Language Learners. It is important to acknowledge that the

cultural tools based on sociocultural theory and constructivist practices create positive literacy outcomes.

Reeves (2011) examined two first year English language learner (ELL) high school teachers over an 18- month period by implementing a descriptive study that tested the efficacy of a scripted instructional program. Classroom observations conducted over a period of three years along with teacher interviews. The teachers explained the pressure they felt from their district to mainstream ELLs, comply with the state testing regimen, and they believed the scripted instruction might be the most efficient. Reeves (2011), observed through a sociocultural lens and found that the scripted program was efficient in providing teachers with the authority of teaching the English language, however it was not determined if it provided teachers with an effective delivery method. Hassett (2008) argued that the scripted instruction lacked scaffolding, and scripted programs often have simple story line plots; students have no opportunity to activate prior knowledge or generate themes. The researcher concluded that further studies would be needed to see if scripted programs raise literacy achievement. The sociocultural and social constructivist theory warrants an improvisational teaching approach, because if classroom instruction is scripted and controlled from the direction of a script, the students cannot ‘co-construct their own knowledge’ (Sawyer, 2004). When students have support with making meaning through explicit instruction and modeled instruction by the teacher, students can construct meaning.

Scripted curricula. To address the literacy problems, many school districts are employing scripted literacy programs in place of teacher created instruction. In an action research study, Dresser (2012) explains the impact of that reality. The study outlines the

researcher blending two well-known teaching methods: reciprocal teaching and narrow reading. Originally, the study began with five participating teachers who implemented an interdisciplinary language arts and science unit by administering all fourth-grade students three pre and posttests (QRI). These tests measure students' prior knowledge of rocks and minerals by reading and writing related passages. The pretests revealed that 18% of the students were decoding below grade level. After the intervention, data was collected, and revealed 12% decoded below grade level. It was also determined that seventy percent of the students read at grade level, and 5% read at a frustrated level. The students who read independently rose from 11% to 18% on the decoding assessment. The teachers were then asked to attend a professional development prior to the study to learn the two intervention methods, however, once they discovered they were required to create their own lessons and assessments, they declined from the study and left the researcher of this study to complete the inquiry. Because the researcher was interested in testing her hypothesis, results of this study indicated that the reciprocal/narrow teaching method showed that students reading achievement improved.

However, the teachers revealed they would rather rely on the scripted instruction than implement an interdisciplinary unit. When the results were shared with colleagues, the teachers chose to revert to the scripted instruction claiming, "they had no time to try new methods" (Rosell, April 15, 2010, personal communication). Typically, teachers embrace the diversity in their classrooms and explore ways to extend their instruction. Unfortunately, many teachers are overwhelmed with other responsibilities as well as fear of rejecting district mandates, even if there's a better approach.

An essential factor that contributes to the problems of improving literacy involves the effects of high stakes testing and standardization of teaching (Au, 2011). However, when school professionals collaborate and work out solutions, students have positive outcomes. Pandya (2012) designed two studies from a sociocultural perspective by examining the Open Court Reading program designed to teach fourth grade students science inquiry skills and higher order thinking. Concurrently, the researcher conducted a year-long ethnographic study of English language learners that focused on the structured curricula and the standardized teaching methods facilitated to this population (Pandya, 2012). The Open Court Reading program was designed of three parts: phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, and vocabulary/writing sections. In the first part of the study, the researcher collected data by classroom observations of the scripted program outlining the inquiry instructions provided to the teachers. From the collected data, Pandya (2012) reported her findings and shared that the ELLs had improved in utilizing content vocabulary, however there were three negative outcomes. The findings demonstrated that the practicality of utilizing teacher-centered pacing guides created confusion among the students of where they were supposed to be in the inquiry. Thus, the teacher spent more time in backtracking and aligning the students to the appropriate tasks. Another result from the study indicated that the teacher had to check the students' conjectures by, "traveling from table to table, but she was unable to engage in discussions because she had to police students' progress and keep them on track" (p. 24). According to Pandya (2012) the worst result of standardizing critical literacy and inquiry was that the teacher and students demonstrated difficulty in maintaining the pace, which drained the students' potential in raising intellectual discussions.

This study obviously reflects the need for teachers to relinquish control over classroom activities and trust their skills of practice, so that student achievement will not be compromised. In addition, the outcomes from this study points to the need of school professionals working in collaboration when scripted programs are a required curriculum protocol in classrooms, so that obtaining higher levels of critical thinking can be realized.

Direct and Explicit Instruction: Should We Teach This Way?

A critical component of a teacher's pedagogy is relying on practices that have been proven to work in improving student achievement. Schools and teachers struggle in searching for the most reliable methods that increase student achievement and typically rely on research for support. There is extensive research that claims direct/explicit teaching helps students comprehend text (Rupley et.al, 2009; Good, 2010). Good (2010) argues, "although there may be better ways of teaching other than large group settings, however this system is research based and flows from evidence and not assertion" (p.43). Rupley, Blair, and Nichols (2009) assert that cognitive strategies require higher levels of cognitive processes and this can be attained "through meaningful teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance" (p.127).

Direct instruction is viewed as less effective and the teacher-centered approach is considered less than favorable. However, sometimes just the right amount of explicit instruction is warranted when the teacher considers the objectives that are to be reached. Teaching reading skills involves explicit/direct literacy instruction as well as providing small group instruction that focuses on individual needs (Black & Allen, 2018; Good, 2010; Lazar, 2012). With active communication, students can summarize a story, analyze events, and infer main ideas (Rupley, et.al). Mayer (2010) argues that when readers make

meaning by interacting with prose passages, research in the science of learning pinpoints that, “knowledge of prose structure is crucial in reading comprehension” (p. 103). Later, students can connect the newly learned concepts to the overall big ideas that empowers them as reflective thinkers.

Wiggins and McTighe (2008) assert “when students need to acquire specific knowledge, skills, and strategies, especially in the context of performance, direct instruction is in order” (p. 290). Research by Good (2010) argues of teachers who are highly knowledgeable in their subject areas, have positive student relationships, and teach in large group settings are more likely to impact student achievement. In contrast, Marzano and Toth (2014) assert that an analysis at their own research center revealed findings of 2 million data points collected from observer rating scales on classroom instructional strategies indicating that teachers are implementing low levels of the Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy. It seems detrimental to students if teachers continue along the path of teaching at lower levels of complexity. A shift in pedagogical practices is necessary and the alignment of teacher training with the standards is evident in the hope of improving student achievement.

Teacher Autonomy

Teachers who become empowered in making decisions to improve student learning can enhance the learning environment and increase student growth. When teachers are granted the authority to have input into school decisions, student growth is enhanced, and teachers feel empowered and are perceived as professionals.

Teacher Decisions

Teachers must also be willing to raise questions and seek support when implementing such programs, so students can reach higher literacy and critical thinking skills. When teachers engage themselves in collaboration with administrative team members then students have a higher likelihood of mastering learning goals. The following study reveals the relationship among school professionals.

In a qualitative study by Morton-Rose (2013), the researcher utilized a dialogical approach, underpinned in sociocultural theory and examined the impact of policies pertaining to mandates on literacy achievement in an elementary school. The study was comprised of six professionals, an administrator, and five classroom teachers. The study examined local policies that were implemented to shape teachers' literacy teaching practices. Data collection by the researcher included interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. The researcher interviewed the superintendent and discussed the basis of policy implementation and how the policies affect school professionals. The superintendent revealed that "student transience was a problem, and policies such as implementing commercially designed curricula and pacing guides assist by providing continuity of instruction when students relocate between schools" (p. 176).

Moreover, teachers provided descriptions regarding their practice and shared their beliefs in relation to local policies indicating they were more invasive than state and federal policies. For example, teachers explained that the district pacing guides significantly reduced their time in administering the required assessments they were expected to give to students and follow through by meeting with colleagues. Another key finding from the study was that the principal was described as highly instrumental in

mediating and communicating policy to her teachers. For instance, in relation to commercial literacy programs, the principal discerned which teaching practices were for show [in her terms] and she made it clear as having the final authority of the literacy practices that needed to be implemented in the school. Gardenhour (2008) asserts, “transformational leadership has been a major part of the foundations of empowerment structures” (p. 25). The goal of transformational leadership is to promote change in the workplace, while changing the individual employee through value systems (Sage, 1996). This study clearly illustrates the point that a transformational leadership stance can shape how others think and behave in the context of having effective schools and creating spaces that improve a school’s culture.

Obstacles in Classroom Teaching

As mentioned earlier, teacher autonomy is not appreciated in all schools; teacher autonomy is a decision typically made by the school’s administrator. Similarly, principals feel pressure with testing requirements, time management, parent interactions, committee meetings, disciplinary actions, and the duties of running a school (Farber, 2010). Differing opinions regarding teacher empowerment prompted a study of teachers’ perceptions relating to empowerment. In 2008, Gardenhour, conducted a random sampling of six school systems; out of 600 teachers, 312 responded to the Psychological Empowerment Instrument Survey (PEI), which included four dimensions of which are: meaning, competence, impact, and self-determination. The researcher claimed that not all teachers may have responded to the emailed surveys. However, the results indicated a positive relationship between teacher years of experience and empowerment. Furthermore, Gardenhour (2008) asserted from his findings that if empowerment relates

to years of experience, then raising the question of its effect on student achievement in schools can be considered.

Veteran teachers often exhibited a higher level of empowerment than beginning teachers, and it was suggested that teachers be involved in a mentoring program.

Contrarily, McNary (as cited in Gardenhour, 2008) found that teachers who did not have autonomy felt oppressed because they felt devalued. The results also confirmed that teacher autonomy was dependent upon the school administrator's willingness to share power among the faculty in making decisions. Furthermore, teachers who shared power and responsibility often created better learning environments for children. This was due to their satisfaction with their role in their school. Teacher efficacy can lead to teachers making critical decisions in how they plan their learning objectives for their students.

Economists and educational research. Pinar (2013) argues that there are other insidious developments that undermine the profession of teaching in the United States, and economics is not reliable to the study of education. For example, in 2012, Harvard economists reported their findings when they tracked 2.5 million elementary and middle school students. The results from the study showed an increase in student achievement on standardized test scores; the economists revered the teachers being the cause of it. Pinar raises the question, "The economists explain that students who have one "excellent" teacher, as defined by students' test scores rose would gain \$4600.00 in life time income, compared to students who scores did not increase, presuming their teacher was average... how would they know it was the teachers?" (p. 17). Furthermore, Harvard economist Diane Coyle (2007) reports, "there hasn't been any evidence of a reciprocal relationship between education and economics... it is problematic when economists confuse

correlation with causation” (p. 17). From an economic perspective, schools have more concerns with the problems of students growing up in poverty-stricken environments, and all school professionals are challenged to thwart the condition, so students can achieve academic success.

Teacher Responsibilities

Another challenge that educators face is described by Darling-Hammond (2014) in her blog post reporting on the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) that teachers spend more hours directly instructing students each week than any other country, and they work more hours in total each week than their global counterparts; a schedule leftover from the factory model school designs of the early 1900s” (American Federation of Teachers, p. 2 as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2014). Eisner (2013) asserts the ethos in American schools is based on the rationalization of extrinsic incentives where holding people accountable based on measurement is the way we describe the world. According to Eisner, (2013) the impact of standardized testing reduces instructional time in classes, since schools are preparing students for them, students lose up to two months of instruction. Teachers rush through their units of study and ultimately those practices diminish the quality of curriculum instruction. In another question posed by Eisner (2013), “What would schools be like if there was not standardized testing? What would the learning look like?” (p. 129). This point declares education and policymakers need to become more collaborative and include educational leaders and teachers to collaborate over policies and practices that will best serve students and raise literacy achievement.

The Need for a Standards-Based Approach

From a progressivist viewpoint, teachers are called to do the job, no matter how difficult, because they wish to impact the world in positive ways. Elmore (2011) asserts that leaders carry three distinctive traits: “perception, responsibility, and initiative” (p.19). Teacher leaders inherently cultivate these life skills in their daily work to create future leaders of tomorrow (Brubaker, 2004). Teacher-created designs reflect the constructivist theory, and teachers communicate learning expectations that students appreciate. The socially situated nature of dialogic discourse enables learners to develop reasoning skills through open-ended discussions. Students negotiate ideas with peers, experience tension in their thinking, and collectively search for meaning (Pennell, 2015). Through dialogic discourse, children articulate and defend their thoughts and they have a higher tendency to engage in critical thinking (Pennell, 2015; Antonetti & Garver, 2015; Marzano, 2010).

In the age of analytic thinking, teachers look for better modes of instruction. Through a lens of transactional theory, students engage in texts through the emotional nuances they encounter through meaningful texts. According to Rosenblatt (1978) reading is efferent and aesthetic. Efferent reading is the typical experience for many students; it is efficient in that the reader can take new knowledge with him.

The aesthetics of reading are also mediated by the learner, and textual interpretation is socially situated (Pennell, 2015). When teachers implement a standards-based approach, their curriculum planning is complicit with the standards outlined by overarching curriculum guidelines. These standards, teaching strategies, and assessments are aligned with the objectives and learning goals. With the standards-based approach,

the teacher is empowered to teach in any style as long the chosen vehicle aligns with the standards (Drake, 2012).

The complexity of the 21st-century skills is challenging for students and teachers. A major focus with students is the mastering of higher-order thinking skills and prepare for college and career readiness. A report by Marzano and Toth (2014) explains that there are essential shifts in pedagogy that needs to occur among educators in preparing students for the rigorous standards. These new state and district standards call educators to remedy the problem of low student achievement and adopt a new shift in pedagogy by, “implementing student-centered strategies and to support student learning by scaffolding basic content to complex applications” (p.10).

According to Toth (2014), who is the CEO of Learning Sciences International described that teachers are still practicing the traditional “teacher centered” strategies. Teachers have the initial task of understanding what the standard is asking the students to learn.

When teachers are conscientious in their design of how standards are delivered, then student achievement is a likely outcome (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005). According to Drake (2012), “these standards are internationally benchmarked and have been vetted by educators, parents, and national math and English organizations” (p. 29). The understanding of the standards and planning intentionally will engage all students with various levels of cognitive ability and support them in achieving academic success.

One of the first components of the standards-based approach in Drake’s (2012) description is the design-down process, which is synonymous with Wiggins & McTighe’s (2005) backwards design. These authors claim that teachers should begin by making a

shift in their approach and develop the evidence (assessments) of learning first instead of relying on traditional practices. Moreover, “curriculum should lay out the most effective techniques in achieving specific results when considering the educational purpose, which is understanding” (p.15). When teachers have knowledge of evidence-based research that supports effective practices then teachers are likely to utilize the practices and strategies that yield literacy achievement.

Summary and Conclusion

This present study addresses the literacy practices and theories that relate to the curriculum pedagogy utilized in primary educational classes. The theoretical framework of the study contains the theories of progressivism and social constructivism, with an emphasis on the sociocultural perspective outlined by Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivism theory.

The middle section discusses a critique of American schools. The conceptualization of theories and how their presence impacts pedagogical practices, such as the impact of zone of proximal development (ZPD) has on student literacy skills. Vygotsky’s (1978) explanation of the different psychological functions and tools that emerge as a child grows intellectually. Specific to the teacher-researcher’s problem of practice, the theory and related researched studies are the focus and goals in the quest of increasing student achievement.

The overall review reflects the reviewer’s in-depth span of current and historic research-based theories and practices that have positively and negatively impacted student literacy achievement. The literature review revealed an interesting paradigm to the reviewer. The influence of sociocultural theory is important to the teaching of reading and writing.

According to the authors, over the past two decades the social theories, although slightly different have been influential in the teaching of literacy skills (Hayes, as cited in Hodges, 2016). In conclusion, the researchers contend that sometimes there's confusion among researchers and that teachers can help lessen those inaccuracies by providing feedback to researchers.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed outline of my research methodology in the pursuit to answer an overarching question that occurs in most American public classrooms: “Can teachers implement their own personal decisions (autonomy) when instructing pupils, and how will these decisions impact student learning? The purpose of this action research study will be to ascertain if personal decisions in selecting and implementing specific, literacy instructional methods affect the overall student achievement. The research question is as follows:

How does the teacher’s personal decisions when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom?

Action research is a practical methodology when conducting research. The methodology for this research incorporates a triangulated mixed-methods design with the implementation of a standards-based approach utilizing the genre of fairy tale instruction to increase student literacy skills. According to Drake (2012) through an effective standards-based approach, the standards are observable and measurable. Teachers have the freedom to choose any style of delivery if the teaching strategies and assessments are aligned with the standards. Unlike traditional research, where the researcher observes

from the outside looking in, the action researcher delves into the research, so she can determine an answer to a problem, or perhaps discover a better practice of instruction that can be implemented in the classroom. This data is analyzed, and the results are then shared with other colleagues and stakeholders within the community. Herr and Anderson (2005) assert that action research has grown favorably in the eyes of educators and educational institutions due to its inherent levels of “data-based decision making” which make it a formidable practice among constituents.

John Dewey (1938) theorized in the early 20th century that more application and understanding of the importance of human interactions was grounded upon the work that active learning among students was a viable practice fostering academic growth. Later, Schron (1983) emphasized the relevance of the reflective practitioner, which still largely exists in most American public classrooms.

However, Herr & Anderson (2005) assert that in the mid-20th century, the use of positivist research came to the forefront. Social sciences and fields such as psychology, which was on top of the hierarchy, were considered credible and yielded valid research results. It is here, where the role of the teacher makes a pivotal and informative contribution. McKernan, cited in Herr & Anderson (2005), explains that teachers were the active researchers in gathering data planned by university researchers from their classroom students. Inevitably, the relevance of action research steadily grew, and by the 1950s, the realization that teachers would benefit from being the reflective practitioner within their classrooms was acknowledged.

Research Design and Intervention

Action research commands the careful implementation of the practitioner-researcher's positionality. Mertler (2017) describes the 'participant as observer' as taking on a much more active role, where the researcher observes and takes notes, but also has the opportunity of interacting with the research participants (students). In this context of a self-study, the researcher's position is founded upon the premise that the study is executed with the practitioner researcher as an active participant observer.

However, Mertler (2017) purports that the researcher will face multiple encounters. One challenge is that the fluid nature of the study will force the insider to reevaluate her steps when observing and collecting data with an effort in keeping the research truthful. Glesne, cited in Mertler (2017), claims that when a researcher functions as a participant observer within an action research study, the threat of losing objectivity arises. The insider positionality could easily lend itself to an "additional set of eyes" that could aid the researcher when observing and collecting data. According to Herr & Anderson (2005) these '*critical friends*' can aid as observers and reinforce the trustworthiness of the study. Colleagues and friends can be those eyes. There were two colleagues I asked support from: my instructional coach and another second-grade teacher. My instructional curriculum coach assisted me in creating a literacy pretest/posttest aligned with our standards. My fellow colleague and second grade team teacher enacted her class to participate as the control group in both pretests/posttests.

Because I serve as the instructor of my students, I had the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of what was happening within the research setting. I implemented my own teacher-created materials that served all students. By engaging as the participant

observer of my study, I sought to foster my personal growth as a professional, whilst maintaining an objective stance, void of bias. I also sought to be the learner as well as the active researcher in seeking to discover whether my intervention would be instrumental in creating growth in student literacy achievement.

Research Context

The research site was best described as a coastal suburban community with a large influx of tourists during the summer months. The school, PAWS Elementary (pseudonym) is considered an award-winning school, achieving National Blue-Ribbon status. Although this area of South Carolina is quite transient, teachers, parents, administrators, and stakeholders have worked closely together in maintaining high expectations. However, over the past fifteen years, PAWS Elementary School has steadily undergone noticeable changes: much like many other parts of the country, we have lower socioeconomic households, students/families in need, struggling workforce, growing crime and drug related concerns, and less parental involvement.

Our school population has grown exponentially from 540 students (1999) to 1,027 students, of which 51% of students receive free and reduced lunch, 73% are Caucasian of which 53% are male, and 47% are female. In terms of minority populations, 8% are of Mixed Race, 3% are Asian, 8% are African American, 6% are Hispanic, 1% are Indian, and 1% are Pacific Islanders (HCS Enrollment Summary, 2019).

Academically, 10% are classified as Self-Contained with special needs, 4% of students are classified as Special Education, and 7% are classified as Academically Gifted, and our English Second Language student enrollment is at 12%. (HCS Enrollment Summary, 2019). As a primary level teacher, I am accountable for teaching literacy skills

as well as subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, written expression, and life skills. Over the past decade, I have noticed a growing trend of less teacher autonomy within our classrooms. Decisions are descended from the administrative unit and are viewed as the final practice without consideration of teachers' professional input. Many decisions are based on the district mandated testing schedules. It is my mission to conduct the action research study and fully examine the impact mandated curriculum decisions versus teacher-created decisions have on student literacy achievement.

Participants and Data Collection Methods

Participants for the study included 21 second-grade students ages 7–8. The classroom environment was comprised of students seated in arranged heterogeneous cooperative groups. Students are taught in the general education curriculum of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Students participating in the study included the following class demographics: 13 males, 8 females, 2% are African American, 1% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 94% are Caucasian (HCS Enrollment Summary, 2019). Most of the students are low-average readers, with a lexicon score ranging from 125 – 450. There are two students that read above grade level with a lexicon score of 650.

Three of my students are considered emergent readers and receive reading intervention support. Within the classroom, there are four students who exhibit emotional and attention difficulties. One female student has severe problems with impulsivity and managing her emotions. There are numerous times when an administrator is asked to take the student for a time out. These outbursts disrupt learning for other students and create tensions within the classroom. There are four male students that have daily behavior charts to assist them in making positive choices throughout the day. Every afternoon,

before dismissal, I interview each student and discuss the behaviors as we complete the chart together. Engaged parents analyze the chart and contact me if they have questions.

In addition, the Assistant Principal had been an immeasurable help to me by checking in on the students and providing incentives. It was imperative that I created engaging lesson plans and chose interesting reading material to hold students' attention. Throughout the school year, there were three students that were diagnosed with learning difficulties: two emotional diagnoses, two with attention deficit/hyper-activity, and one diagnosed with a reading disability. Moreover, there were two students that appeared to suffer in low socio-economic conditions, resulting in one of the students and his siblings being taken from the biological parents and placed into foster care. The other student is on the radar for engaging in bizarre behaviors that include placing feces in the classroom.

Once I received parental permission for students to participate in the study, I closely monitored which students were to be part of this action research study. Parents received letters that offered an option for their child's data to not be part of the study if they choose. In addition, the participant observer also requested parental permission from the parents of my colleague's 21 students who served as the control group.

Action research lends itself to a practical design, where my classroom of 21 second-grade students served as the convenience sample in my study. Because my study demands a triangulated design, my students received the same level of instruction while qualitative data was collected via classroom observations and student artifacts. Here, students participated in the activities and were asked to perform reading and writing tasks.

There are a variety of action models that can be used in action research. Mertler (2017) explains four main phases that are implemented within an action research study. These components include: *the planning, acting, developing, and reflecting stages*. These stages of the action research study enabled me to conduct a succinct study, thus answering my research question.

Data Collection Strategy

The intervention began on March 4, 2019 and lasted for seven weeks. My colleague (second grade teacher) and I administered the pretest to both the control and treatment groups, respectively. After the pretest was administered and then gathered for grading, the intervention was initiated. By implementing whole class instruction and small group settings, I was empowered in observing my study participants' conversations, musings, and reactions during standard-based instruction through whole group and small group structures. Upon collection of the groups' pretests, I utilized descriptive statistics in analyzing the quantitative data. My objective was to determine the growth changes among students who received the treatment and compare their pretest and posttest results. The pre and posttests yielded raw data that highlighted the treatment and control groups central tendency values—the means.

Planning Stage

The planning stage of the action research project involved identifying a problem of practice, gathering information, reviewing related research, and developing a research plan (Mertler, 2017). During the first phase, I evaluated and refocused my question from a broad topic to one of more specificity: How does the teacher's personal decision(s) when implementing a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a

second-grade classroom? My literature review assisted me in gaining insight into research studies that helped with the organization and development of the action plan.

Evolution of the research focus. I teach second grade students, and for many years after speaking with colleagues and noticing familiar patterns that indicated students were not given specific learning opportunities. This observation led to my chief frustration and design of my problem of practice. I often found myself asking the proverbial question, “Why aren’t teachers more empowered in implementing effective decisions that could increase student literacy?”

It is fair to say that evaluations and assessments are important in ascertaining student achievement, but not to the extent of relying on instruction of isolated skills to meet a summative assessment goal. It increasingly appears that teachers are inadvertently thwarting the depth and brevity of real instruction for sake of test scores. “Our educational climate is becoming increasingly data-driven all the time” (Mertler, p. 21, 2017). By noticing this reoccurring theme, I am compelled in making a change in my personal classroom and perhaps with other colleagues within my school. This is the catalyst that led me to critically think about and hopefully change as I grow alongside my students as an effective teacher.

With the literature review, I was educated from various theories and educational research studies of ways in which educators from the past to the present have empowered themselves. It is imperative to understand that teacher-made decisions can positively impact student achievement. Mertler, (2017) posits, “when teachers collect their own data to make their own decisions about their students and classrooms... they become empowered” (p. 21). Due to my action research study being centered around the

implementation of teaching second graders' literacy skills, I concluded that I could experiment and stray a little from the data-driven path by implementing something new and hopefully beneficial to my students. The goals in teaching literacy help students to appreciate literary works, but also make sense in the world they interact with.

Acting Stage

Action research lends itself well to the systematic method of investigation of a teaching method (Mertler, 2017). This proposed action research study encompassed a mixed-methods design that was executed over a seven-week unit of study and took place at the PAWS Elementary School. Triangulation of the action research study was implemented; "with three different sources of data collected, there is less chance of contradiction and more accurate conclusions will be drawn" (Mertler, 2017, p. 142).

The study began with the teacher-created literacy pretest during Week 1, followed by a posttest administered in Week 6. My colleague, (second grade teacher) also administered the identical pretest to her class of 21 second grade students during Week 1. From there, I implemented literacy activities while collecting student data (artifacts and utilized my research journal) simultaneously utilizing the hybrid intervention literacy unit (whole group instruction coupled with small group instruction) to my class over the study period.

However, the control group received instruction from my colleague who utilized the district's mandated reading series, *Imagine It*, with a specific genre/fictional narrative chosen by the teacher and is comparable to my teacher-created unit. For example, I employed fairy tale picture books, and my colleague implemented a classic fairy tale, or fictional narrative from the *Imagine It* reading series. Under the same standards, we both

taught the reading comprehension skills that are aligned with our district's literacy standards.

Intervention

When teachers implement a standards-based approach, their curriculum planning is complicit with the standards outlined by overarching curriculum guidelines. These standards, teaching strategies, and assessments are aligned with the objectives and learning goals. With the standards-based approach, the teacher is empowered to teach in any style if the chosen vehicle aligns with the standards (Drake, 2012). Drake (2012) defines the standards-based approach:

1. A design-down curriculum planning process is used.
2. The focus is on what students will do, not what the teacher will do.
3. Standards, teaching strategies, and assessment are aligned.
4. The standards are observable and measurable.
5. The assessment of standards is embedded in instructional strategies.

The genre of fairy tales had been selected as my chosen vehicle. However, when students participating in learning goals that measure how they analyze interactions of characters, characters' actions impacting the development of the plot, characters' point of view, and specifically, the genre of fantasy, which brings depth to the readers and are considered an art form. Fairy tales are comprehensible to the child, and the fairy tales' deepest meaning will be unique from one student to another (Bettleheim, p.12, 1975). According to Bourke (2008) students question texts as well as their experiences and beliefs, they are engaging in deeper practices of critique and analysis. The discovery of these archetypes led me to my question: How does the teacher's personal decisions

when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom?

Table 3.1

SC ELA Ready Standards

Standard 7: Analyze the relationship among ideas, themes or topics in multiple media and formats and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Retell the sequence of major events using key details, determine the theme in a text heard or read. b. Read or listen closely to compare and contrast multiple versions of the same story.
Standard 8: Analyze characters, settings, events, and ideas as they develop and interact within a particular context.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.1 Read or listen closely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Compare and contrast characters' actions, feelings, and responses to major events or challenges; b. Explain how cause and effect relationships affect the development of plot; c. Recognize differences between the points of view and perspectives of the narrator and various characters.
Standard 9: Identify the literary devices of simile and metaphor and sound devices; explain how the author uses each.

Implementing the plan and collecting data. The second phase described by Mertler, (2017) was known as the acting stage. In this stage, the researcher collected and analyzed data. Throughout this stage, I collected quantitative as well as qualitative data and then assessed whether my study had answered my research question. As the teacher-researcher, I remained objective as possible when collecting and recording my data (Mertler, 2017). Hence, both types of data were collected approximately the same time and were weighted equally. After the collection of both data types, I learned more about the impact that the treatment provided to my students (Mertler, 2017).

A mixed-methods design contains a synergistic component. For instance, the mixed-methods design enabled me to compare quantitative and qualitative data sources

throughout the intervention. With this method, I was able to compare the collected qualitative data by analyzing the participants' discussions in whole group and small group settings. Qualitative data works in a convergent manner, and I could observe the fluidity of vocabulary usage being mediated among students. The participants were exhibiting deeper levels of comprehension related to the literacy skills of plot line elements. Terms they have never heard before were now manifested among learners. These words included: *exposition, resolution, solution, climax, theme, and conflict*. See Appendix G. As the participant observer, I was able to monitor and adjust whole group and small group lessons by implementing my decisions that I perceived to be pertinent to the learning.

Teacher-Developed Pretests and Posttests

The treatment and control groups of the two second grade classrooms participated in a pretest and posttest developed by the teacher-researcher. See Appendix A. The pretest-posttest design assessed students' knowledge of literary elements pertaining to characterization, plot line elements, setting, characters' feelings/actions to events, conflict, characters' point of view, and identifying themes. The ten-item multiple-choice test was administered prior to the intervention and at the study's conclusion. Mertler (2017) contends that exposing students to an instructional "treatment" or intervention may be necessary in measuring changes within the design and purpose of the study. As the participant observer, I examined the results and compared them to the teacher-made posttest of specific literacy skills that were taught throughout the seven- week period. Based on the readings from Mertler (2017), I employed a control group (that was not exposed to the treatment condition) which assisted me by comparing the experimental

group's pretest and posttest scores, enabling me as the researcher in determining whether the treatment had been effective.

The pre-and posttest control group design for this study was reviewed by three educators. Their knowledge and expertise assisted me as the participant observer with vetting the appropriate pretest-posttest questions. One colleague was chosen due to her 10 years of experience with teaching second grade students. She was considered an accomplished educator in the teaching of literacy skills. The second professional was my primary instructional coach who cross-referenced each test item and analyzed the vocabulary used. She determined that the test items were indicative of the SC Standards.

Finally, a Doctor of Education and graduate from the University of South Carolina also reviewed the instrument, and determined that the questions were challenging, but she did state that she was not familiar with elementary grade level standards. All three colleagues' input further validated the realm of questions used for this study.

Researcher's Journal

Qualitative data assists the researcher in a mixed- methods design by gathering and recording data from the treatment group. Throughout the intervention, I utilized my research journal to capture the thoughts and reactions of the treatment group participants. Mertler (2017) asserts that unstructured observations are more practical within the classroom. As the participant observer, I needed the flexibility within my classroom to move fluidly from teaching, to observing my students, and recording the data. Proactive measures were necessary when implementing this form of data collection and keeping the classroom as normal as possible was key. The observational notes I obtained concurrently

with students completing various literacy skills and participating in small group discussions was the evidence that portrayed my triangulation. By utilizing field notes and researcher's reflective journal as recommended by Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, (2009) I was successful in obtaining student perceptions, records of instruction provided, and information from qualitative assessments. According to Mertler, (2017) field notes are taken during classroom observations, however, they can be problematic. To negate this, I would routinely carry my journal with me and jot down notes. I systematically recorded students' participation during small cooperative group settings as well, however, I was careful in being discreet as possible by interjecting discussion questions. I later reviewed the video recordings and wrote the notes into my journal.

Table 3.2

Research Schedule for Treatment Group

Activity to Be Completed	Estimated Amount of Time	Target Date for Completion	Task Completed
Pretest/read aloud <i>Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude</i>	60 minutes – began discussion of story elements & nouns/adjectives	March 4, 2019	March 4, 5, 2019
Whole Group discussion of characters and setting, problem, solution, narrators			
Discussion of adjectives/nouns. Identify verbs from the story (whole group) Complete word charts	60 minutes	March 6	March 6
Character Traits/ Personality Traits and Physical attributes – began illustrating posters	45 minutes- discussion/Chart whole group	March 11 Posters took four days – 11 th – 14 th .	March 14
Reviewed the “Five Essential Elements of a Fairy Tale Story”/ <i>The Frog Prince</i>	20 minutes (video) – 30 whole group discussion/carpet	March 7 th and 8 th	March 8th
Hot Pot – spelling words			
Point of View of Characters (Talking Points)	Whole group mini lesson – 15 min. 60 minutes – dialogic discourse – (video recorded)	March 20	March 20, 21

Hot Pot Spelling Words	15 minutes	March ?	March 22
Videos – <i>Mike’s New Car</i> and <i>UP, Lion King, Inside Out, and Finding Nemo</i>	45 minutes		March 22
Plot Diagram taught through clips			
Began workstations – Students read other fairy tales of their choice/reading level focused on plot line diagrams/compare/contrast; POV/themes with other stories	60 minutes for two weeks – discussion/writing and small group	Began March 8 - ongoing	March 19
Cause and Effect - How Characters Respond Beginning to End/ Brain Pop on C&E (Plot Line)	Two 60- minute blocks (whole group)	March 26, 27	March 26, 27
Hot Pot – Spelling Words	Hot Pot -15 min. Two (45 - 60) minute sessions. Whole group (add pictures)	March 28	March 28 and 29
Quiz-Quiz-Trade: plot line and essential story elements			
Talking Chips – analyzing and discussion of author’s message and characters/motivations	60 minutes; small co-op groups	March 29th	March 29
Fairy tale themes in class and in library. (<i>The Bad Seed</i> and <i>Senorita Gordita</i>)	Four days in class (30 min.) (40 min. in afternoon library.) 60 – 75 minutes	April 1 – 4 th library in afternoon)	April 1- 4 th .
Began Writer’s Workshop- mini - lesson (Opener... <i>Once Upon a...</i> (modeled with chart)		WW – April 2 nd	April 2 nd - ongoing
Similes and Metaphors	Two whole group- 30 minutes	April 7 th	April 7 th & 8th
Sequencing of plot line	45 minutes (whole group)	April 8th	
Sequencing of plot line	60 minutes (small cooperative groups)	April 11	April 11
Writer’s Workshop -Synthesize: rewrite/recreate events of the fairy tale with (small group instruction)	Whole group mini lessons/small group conferences during the 6 th and 7 th week	April 2nd	April 18 th
Culminating Activity <i>Author’s Chair</i> Whole group	60 minutes- parents participate and listen to stories being read	April ?	April 26 th .

Formative assessments during instruction. Because my study warranted for students to read and respond, most of my classroom assessments were administered to aid in my instruction of specific goals and objectives. Unlike summative assessments, formative assessments are administered during classroom instruction and any adjustments can be made by the action researcher if needed (Mertler, 2017). In addition, summative

and formative assessments are considered advantageous to the researcher because they are considered as ‘existing data’ and are present at the classroom and teacher level (Mertler, 2017). I concluded that these types of assessments are authentic to daily classroom and instruction and assist in making the study manageable. For instance, when implementing spontaneous tasks, such as oral questioning, and student reflections, formative assessments allow for any needed adjustments to occur during instructional time (Mertler, 2017). Table 3.2 shows the learning activities administered over a seven-week period for the treatment group beginning March 4, 2019 and concluding April 26, 2019. Table 3.2 outlines the various lessons taught including time frames for small group and whole group instruction. The activities were purposely chosen by the teacher-researcher based upon the constructs related to the research study. In addition, my district requires teachers to follow the mandated standards. By continuing with the cyclical action research model, the teacher-researcher commenced the treatment intervention with a teacher-developed pretest. The pre and posttests were administered to the treatment and the control group.

Action Research Validity

Mertler (2017) purports action research is not to generalize findings to other or larger settings, but to have only a clear and distinct assessment of the action researcher’s classroom setting. Unlike traditional research, which is largely accomplished by quantifiable methods, my role as the active insider within the qualitative context was to accentuate the construct validity and instrument reliability within my study (Mertler, 2017).

Action research allows for transferability, to where an outsider can read and become familiar with the context of the setting. (Mertler, 2017). Because my study consists of qualitative and quantitative methods, it is here where action research is validated. My goal was not to generalize results to other settings, but to gain a clear and in-depth understanding of my own personal setting (Mertler, 2017). These forms of trustworthiness, which are vital to any qualitative data analysis are key tenets within my action research study. According to Mertler, (2017) triangulation is an essential component of a mixed-methods design and lends itself well to action research. For instance, in featuring my small groups, I noticed students were utilizing the vocabulary and comprehension skills that coincided with the pre- and posttest components.

Weeks 1 through 3

Typically, I approach my instruction based upon where I observe the students' levels of learning. There are instances where some learning opportunities lend themselves to whole class instruction, and others to small group settings. During the intervention, the literacy intervention assignments averaged sixty minutes per day. Upon completion of the pretest, I began the treatment group's intervention with a whole class read aloud featuring a modern fairy tale, *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude* written by Kevin O'Malley. The students were prompted to engage in the story by asking questions and making predictions. Students were encouraged to participate and add their musings, thoughts, and questions relating to character traits, plot, describing the characters, and characters' actions within the story.

Weeks 4 through 7

The goal of action research is to collect data and measure the data accurately when it comes to answering a research question. Mertler, (2017) explains the overarching theme of ‘trustworthiness’ as being indicative of an action research study. As the practitioner- researcher of my study, it was important for me to be cognizant of my data collection, so that I could explain any subtle distractions or contradictions that may have surfaced, thus resulting in credible results.

During the intervention, the treatment group participated in whole class (minilessons) instruction coupled with small group writing instruction beginning in week five. These lessons were initially conducted in a whole group format while students observed me as I modeled writing the recreation of events in a story. In week five, students were instructed to create events and characters by producing a writing sample during independent seatwork and small group instructional time. Small group writing sessions were implemented to meet students’ needs as they began writing their initial drafts. In addition, groups were rearranged in accordance to students’ personality traits and reading levels. The school’s suggested schedule for academic instruction was altered as I implemented lessons.

Finally, students were engaged in discussion and small group activities that provided reinforcement of literary elements relating to how the characters’ actions affected the plot of the story. Writing lessons were conducted as whole class instruction and then later were reinforced through small group settings. Some lessons such as, figurative language; using similes and metaphors were implemented as writing strategies to be used in the recreated fairy tales. The combination of various student works and

artifacts were collected over the seven-week period and were labeled according to organized schemes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Classroom artifacts. The implementation of classroom artifacts created by the participants as well as teacher -developed artifacts served as additional evidence within my qualitative data collection. The artifacts were strategically chosen and administered based upon their complexity of literary concepts. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), research-generated documents are utilized in action research and can reveal important information. For example, the implementation of classroom artifacts completed by students in the form of written activities can be part of data collection (Mertler, 2017). The artifacts collected were related to the constructs within the research study. These artifacts included: compare and contrasting of literary texts, characters' viewpoints, sequencing events, cause and effect relationships, and the participants' versions of plot lines.

Furthermore, the South Carolina Ready Standards are professional artifacts that assisted me in facilitating formative assessment tools. As the teacher researcher, I became active in having students practice critical thinking skills, vocabulary development, synthesizing, and honing their communication skills through writing lessons. When teachers are involved in action research, data from student artifacts can assist teacher researchers with deeper analysis in answering their research question (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014).

As the participant observer, I examined the qualitative results and compared them to the teacher created posttest of specific literacy skills that were taught throughout the seven-week period. From here, I obtained both qualitative data as well as quantitative

data. The observational notes I obtained concurrent with students completing various literacy tasks and participating in small group discussions (dialogic discourse) was my triangulated evidence. Students participated in five specific activities relating to literacy standards: character traits, points of view, compare/contrast, sequencing events identifying plot line elements, and making connections to themes that were inferred from other relevant texts.

Small groups. Because the nature of my research was of an inductive type, I employed qualitative data methods featuring the groupings of my students. I incorporated small group instruction when I observed struggling students who were not showing understanding of specific learning tasks. Small group instruction serves as a good model for review and reinforcement after whole class instruction. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) state that the investigator must discipline herself to make decisions that narrow the study, and not pursue everything.

Table 3.3

DIBELS: The Pelicans - Reading Levels

Number of Respondents/Students 21	Intensive	Strategic	Benchmark (meets grade level)	Exceeds Benchmark
	3 (14%)	3 (14%)	8 (38%)	7 (33%)

Consequently, during the intervention, I determined that my struggling group of readers (the Pelican Group) would meet with me during small group. We began by identifying character traits, characters' reactions to events, compare and contrast different

fairy tale stories, and character attitudes/emotions presented in the story’s plot. During this time, students shared their thinking and commented on various story elements. We would review the elements of fairy tales and engage in discussions regarding their wonderings. I was prepared to focus on the standards that were most relevant to a specific learning objective. Audio recordings of student conversations were completed, and field notes were written for analysis.

Table 3.4

Small Group that Meets with Me for Scaffolded Writing

Pelican Group	
Ariel	Emma
Patty	Ike
Kenny	Ricky

Table 3.5

Small Cooperative Groups

Loggerheads 1	Loggerheads 2	Carolina Wrens 3	Carolina Wrens 4
Ariel	Sophie	Lacy	Brian
Patty	Allen	Courtney	Karli
Emma	Kylie	Ryan	Jake
Corey	Trey	Mark	Matthew
Conner	Ike	Kenny	Ricky

Developing small groups. Throughout the hybrid approach, I strategically planned lessons that warranted either whole group instruction, small group instruction, or small cooperative learning groups. Tables 3.4 and 3.5 illustrate the small cooperative

groups (Loggerheads 1 & 2 and Carolina Wrens 3 & 4) that were featured in this action research study. Hence, students were grouped for assorted reasons; for instance, the colors represent the students' Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (See Table 3.6).

The overall study participants were grouped for various reasons; one factor was by DIBELS reading levels. In the table, red indicates that the students received intensive reading instruction from a reading interventionist (this group returns to me for small group), yellow refers to strategic reading instruction (these students stay in class), green and blue demonstrate benchmark and highly proficient readers, respectively. The Pelican Group is my small group that received scaffolded instruction throughout the intervention. However, during small cooperative group settings, these students were rejoined with their original Loggerheads and Carolina Wrens.

Table 3.6

Pelican Group: Struggling Readers

Student	Composite Score	Lexile Levels	Received RTI 1 hour per day	Pretest Score % of 100	Posttest Score % of 100
Kenny	117 Intensive	BR100–50L	Yes	40	50
Patty	134 Intensive	120L–270L	Yes	Missed pretest	60 (score not in stats)
Ariel	84 Intensive	40L–190L	Yes	50	50 (oral admin.)
Ike	159 Strategic	80L–230L	No	20	60
Ricky	182 Strategic	0L–150L	No	20	70
Emma	163 Strategic	90L–280L	No	30	90

During Weeks 1–4, I grouped students based on their reading levels and personalities to scaffold and provide extra support during small group settings. Other factors relating to the small cooperative groupings included students’ personality traits, behavior characteristics, cooperativeness, and Lexile reading levels. Table 3.6 illustrates a group of students who have struggled with literacy skills throughout the school year. For anonymity purposes, I assigned students with pseudonyms. In my district, we assess students implementing various summative assessments, and one of these is the DIBELS assessment. This assessment evaluates reading fluency, fluency accuracy, phonemic awareness, site word recognition, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (retell).

Another assessment that is administered three times per year is the Measure of Academic Performance (MAP) Assessment. This is a norm-referenced assessment, however only the MAP Reading Lexile ranges were extracted from the March Reading Assessment administered in 2019. The Lexile ranges of each study participant assisted me in creating groups by providing updated measurements of the students’ reading levels.

The Lexile scores are similarly equated to grade level equivalencies using the nationally normed reference framework by MetaMetrics. However, MetaMetrics maintains that there is no direct correspondence between Lexile measures and a specific grade level. Consequently, the information described below is for descriptive purposes pertaining to the study’s participants. According to MetaMetrics, the typical Lexile range for second grade is 170L – 545L. Contrarily, the typical range for Lexile ranges based on College and Career Ready Standards that my district employs is 420L – 650L (Lexile

Framework, MetaMetrics, Inc). Relevant information, including the pre-and posttest scores of each participant from the Pelican Group is disclosed in Table 3.4.

Whole Group Instruction

Shanahan (2018), a literacy expert asserts, “Never do with a small group, what could be done well with the whole class” (blog post). I typically conduct whole group instruction in a very specific format. Whole class instruction allows a teacher to build students’ prior knowledge, deliver a sequenced curriculum, and explicitly teach what students need to know and be able to do. Whole group instruction builds students’ knowledge and skills before moving into a contextualized application (Killian, 2014). Another way I initiated whole group instruction was by embedding structured activities through an explicit-facilitative approach, such as Quiz-Quiz-Trade, Hot Pot, Think -Pair - Share, and other activities that foster student dialogue and engagement.

Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1986) assert that an individual’s cognitive acts are mediated through semiotic tools, such as language (Pennell, 2012). The nature of dialogic discourse promotes comprehension and reinforces higher-order thinking skills. These techniques created learning situations for many of my students who do not have issues with decoding but needed the enhanced practice of explaining and elaborating their thoughts about the literary concepts.

Whole group instruction involved participants having direct eye contact with one another, and me, acting as the facilitator. I taught minilessons regarding physical attributes and personality traits to strengthen vocabulary. When a teacher is empowered, she can adjust lessons such as implementing a kinesthetic activity. I knew many of my students would struggle with some of the vocabulary words, so I implemented a spelling

game known as “Hot Pot” to strengthen vocabulary and provide students with opportunities to see, hear, say, write, and draw these words.

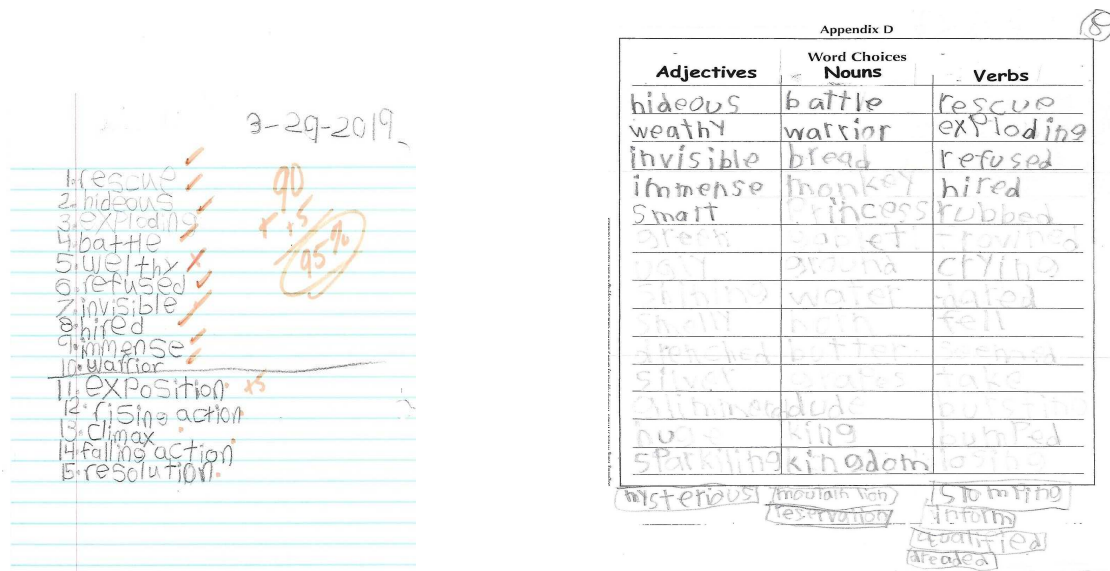


Figure 3.1 Samples of spelling and vocabulary words during whole group.

By implementing my teacher discretion, I was able to adjust my pace and extend periods of time to emphasize the importance of vocabulary building. Students needed repeated exposure to these high-level and multisyllabic words, so this whole group activity required active engagement. Students were to listen to others who provided the correct letter in the spelling of words. All students must say the correct letter when it became their turn. If they say the incorrect letter, the rule is to sizzle (sit down). In addition to spelling practice, and pronunciation, this activity lends itself well to the discussion of words and how these vocabulary words relate to language skills. These skills slowly build upon students' vocabulary repertoire, and ultimately improves literary skills. Students can ask questions about the pronunciation and examples are shared in

how to use the vocabulary. For example, the word *invisible* was highly interesting to many students, and they expressed an interest to applying the word to their own fairy tale. Having exposures such as this during whole group instruction assists students in understanding these words when they are by themselves in the future (Vygotsky, 1978).

Measuring Quantitative and Qualitative Data

One important aspect to be mindful of is that qualitative research is not linear step-by step process, and “data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities” (Merriam and Tisdell, p. 191). In a triangulated mixed-methods design, the “qualitative and quantitative data types are weighted equally, and the results are interpreted simultaneously and treated in a convergent manner” (p. 196). In this method of collection, the researcher values both types of data, and the results of the analyses possess a greater form of credibility (Mertler, 2017).

Quantitative data collection. Pretest and posttest quantitative results were analyzed and presented in charts. By use of linear measures, a descriptive analysis can be employed using the measure of central tendency – mean. According to Mertler (2017) “the mean is the most commonly used measure of central tendency” (p. 179). Additionally, a repeated measures *t* test compared two measures taken on the same individuals (Mertler, 2017, p. 186). The students were pretested, exposed to the intervention, then post-tested. The pretest mean was compared with the posttest mean for the same group of students who received the intervention. In addition, the comparison of pre and posttest data resulted using “*t*” to determine if the results were statistically significant. In addition, a comparison group that did not receive the intervention (another

2nd grade class), completed the pre and posttest and was compared with the treatment group.

Qualitative data collection. Qualitative analysis involves the process of inductive methods. By utilizing students' classroom artifacts, as the participant observer I utilized an open coding scheme as detailed in the grounded theory approach, which categorizes the data based upon similar types of information. As the participant observer, I analyzed volumes of narrative data, and ongoing collection and analysis was necessary until reaching saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To reduce the volume of my data, I began to see emerging patterns and trends. I organized the data into collective themes by designating specific colors to pieces during collection of artifact data, I coded information relevant to my study and the theoretical framework that informed my study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Axial coding is the process of grouping open codes and “constructing categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across the data...categories are abstractions derived from the data, not data themselves” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 207). This same method was applied when analyzing the field notes. However, Merriam & Tisdell assert that “findings can also be in the form of descriptive accounts” (p. 202). I used written descriptions from my research journal and described the main characteristics of the categories that resulted from my coding scheme. From here, as the participant observer, I was able to connect and interpret the data to my original research question. This method assisted me in constructing a framework for presenting my findings (Mertler, 2017).

Limitations of the Study

The proposed action research study presented two limitations. First, the timeframe of 6-8 weeks in collecting student data in qualitative and quantitative form can limit the researcher's ability to triangulate the data in the study. Secondly, the sample size in the proposed study is small, and not all 41 students from both second-grade classes were able to participate in all aspects of the study (e.g. five students in all did not take the assessment). Given school guidelines, quantitative data collection can only be accessible during the early fall and winter months of the school year, subsequently creating difficulty for the researcher to gather data. The school district guidelines require any practitioner researcher to follow proper protocol in obtaining written consent and authorization when conducting research. The collection of data is limited to specific times during the school year which can also shorten the amount of time effects of instruction can be measured.

Ethical Considerations

Action research must follow and be sensitive to ethical considerations of participants involved within any action research study. As Dana and Yendel-Hoppy (2014) assert, "Working in the best interest of the students means systemically investigating one's own teaching as well as being mindful of the ethical codes of conduct when carrying out the research" (p. 149).

The ethical considerations when implementing action research required me to be responsible in safeguarding the participants' rights within the study, while completing research in a professional and productive manner. The ethical standards interwoven within a process of a research study involved protecting participants' anonymity included

providing my students with pseudonyms (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). The action research within this study served as a vehicle in improving my own practice, but may produce outcomes that can better serve students, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Professionally, I am required to follow and administer the ethical guidelines per school district guidelines as well. All research proposals must be approved by the district, specified by the Director of Assessment and Program Evaluation coordinator before the site-based principal will approve conducting the research study (H. Sheehan, personal communication on November 18, 2016). The teacher- researcher for the proposed study followed the guidelines in obtaining parental consent for each student participant in the research study. Additionally, the teacher -researcher is responsible for disclosing a description of the intended classroom research by sending a letter home to the participants' parents prior to the implementation of the study. (H. Sheehan, personal communication on November 18, 2016).

Classroom teachers have the unique capacity in shaping the culture and atmosphere of the classroom. In my action research study, I implemented democratic practices and theories that would enhance a culture of acceptance within my classroom. I will share these practices with fellow colleagues as well as parents and stakeholders.

At our school, we seek to implement a variety of ways to perpetuate the feeling, “that we are all in this together.” Students, teachers, and parents work collaboratively to ensure that all students participate in our various campaigns or service-learning projects. In our classrooms, teachers actively engage their students by having them reflect on these experiences via conversations or sharing through writing experiences. However, there is a growing concern with the English Language Learners who predominantly come from a

bilingual home, where the students read in English, but their parents cannot. I have noticed over the years that the ELL students required additional literacy support.

As an action researcher, I incorporated a classroom culture where ELL students felt comfortable and valued in the classroom. In addition, according Dana and Yendel-Hoppey (2014), I was cognizant of my duties as a teacher in a public- school setting and ensured that my study's design accentuated the regular school curriculum, rather than thwart it.

As a re-occurring theme within my grade level, we continue to explore the nuances of “empathy and equity” for all students, so that these values are communicated to their families and the community. Some examples of social justice are subtle within our classroom(s), but fundamentally important. For instance, the sharing demonstrated within our morning “Community Circles” enables my second graders to share their experiences and learn from one another. This circle time allows for the entire class, including myself to understand multiple perspectives.

Moreover, there is an unprecedented need for new and veteran teachers to be “equipped with the sophisticated tools to teach the growing numbers of students who come from homes with fewer educational resources” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 2). In some cases, these students lack the reading support from their parents due to language barriers. Providing reading opportunities, (e.g., after-school reading clubs) with students and parents can help fill that void. In addition, the culminating activity, *The Author's Chair* added to the integrity of the study by students demonstrating mastery of the material.

Action research can empower teachers to make changes within their school(s). Moreover, Fleischer asserts, “today’s reality is that most teachers are no longer living in isolation behind their closed doors; we need to strategically inform others” (p. 20). As an action researcher, I plan to incorporate a classroom culture where ELL students feel comfortable and valued in the classroom. The action research, along with careful data analysis can help me in determining the most effective strategies and allow for the best instructional methods when teaching not only ELL students, but all students.

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 3 included a description of the research design and the methods of analysis within the study. A rationale was provided that delineated the research as a mixed-methods design through an action research approach. A description of the research setting, which included specific details relevant to the sample, the school, researcher, and participants. An outline over the seven-week period described the data types, data collection, and data analysis. Open axial coding of the data was described when examining field notes during data collection. Chapter 4 will provide the results from the data.

Chapter 4

Implications and Findings

Chapter 4 addresses the findings and implications of this action research study, the impact of implementing a hybrid-instructional approach of whole group and small group instruction to improve literacy achievement in a second-grade classroom. The findings were based on the implementation of data analysis, coding, and identifying themes. The chapter begins by revisiting the Problem of Practice, the research question, the intervention of the teacher-developed hybrid approach of small and whole group instruction and concludes with the general findings of the research.

Overview of the Study

The participant observer enacted the cyclical design of action research model that encompasses the acting, developing, and refining stages (Mertler, 2017). During the planning stage, the researcher identified the Problem of Practice (POP), teachers are not empowered to deliver their personal decision-making practices pertaining to the student literacy achievement. Through the planning stage, the participant observer reviewed professional studies and literature to gain insight into the problem. Throughout this process, the participant observer sought to refine the research question:

How does the teacher's personal decisions when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom? Once the research question was refined through the implementation of review

of the literature, valuable insights were illuminated. Mertler (2017) asserts that previous research findings can lead to informative connections about a proposed action research study and what others have done. In addition, the research findings could support recent trends that uphold classroom instruction through small group methods.

Upon completion of the literature review, the next step is to choose the appropriate research design for collecting and analyzing the researcher's data (Mertler, 2017). During the acting stage, the researcher employed a mixed-methods design consisting of quantitative instrumentation and qualitative methods. The study began by the participant observer administering a pretest and posttest to two groups of students in different 2nd grade classrooms: treatment and control groups. In terms of sample characteristics, the control group was like the treatment group in racial composition and abilities. The pre-posttest examined both groups' knowledge of specific literary elements commensurate with the state's curriculum standards. Upon completion of the literature review, the next step is to choose the appropriate research design for collecting and analyzing the researcher's data (Mertler, 2017).

Sample Characteristics

During the intervention, the convenience sample was comprised of the researcher's classroom students. The participants consisted of 13 males and eight females. The racial composition included: 2% African American, 1% Asian, 1% Hispanic, and 94% are Caucasian (HCS Enrollment Summary, 2019). The students within the treatment demonstrated a range of reading skills, from low to high levels. As mentioned earlier, several students were diagnosed with a specific disorder during the winter and spring of 2019. One student attended daily reading instruction through English

Language Learner (ELL) services, and three others participated in reading intervention classes for 60 minutes daily. The sample featured 70 percent of the participants as performing on grade level in reading when they entered the second grade. Consequently, this 2018-2019 school year was atypical, since the district had lost three weeks of school due to Hurricane Florence. Students who were required to spend time in intervention were postponed from these learning opportunities. Throughout the entire investigation, there were multiple evaluations in progress, and several of my students were pulled from instruction to complete testing that was administered by the school psychologist. Other students, who had suffered from impulsivity and acts of aggression were dismissed from classroom instruction to speak with guidance counselors or administration.

Once the intervention commenced, several changes occurred related to the sample characteristics. For example, several students had been officially diagnosed with a specific disorder. Of those five students, two received an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and three were placed on medication to assist them with sustaining attention during the school day. Another student who demonstrated acts of aggression was also placed on medication. Because action research occurs in real time, the investigation began on schedule and permission was granted by parents and guardians for their student to participate in the research study. Mertler (2017) refers to this as the acting stage, where I as the researcher employed a mixed-methods design consisting of quantitative instrumentation and qualitative methods.

Overview of the Intervention

The intervention began with the administration of the literary (narrative) elements pretest and concluded with the posttest to the researcher's treatment group and the control group (students in another 2nd grade classroom).

The pre and posttests examined both groups' knowledge of specific literary elements commensurate with the state and district curriculum standards before and after the intervention. The intervention was executed concurrently with the inclusion of the qualitative collection strategy featuring student artifacts and unstructured observations. Through the mixed-methods design, I also employed a researcher's journal and transferred what I observed into field notes that were later analyzed.

During the hybrid-instructional approach, I blended whole group and small group instruction that was embedded in a fairy tale genre unit that was developed by the teacher-researcher. I was empowered in collecting classroom artifacts (formative assessments), engaging students in dialogic discourse, Bakhtin (1980) theory, while situating these methods according to the social constructivist theory founded by Lev Vygotsky (1978). During the intervention, it became apparent that recording students' discussions and interactions was a critical adjustment that needed to be made. When students are granted the opportunity to share ideas and discuss their thinking, the learning seems to generate deeper meaning. Students engaged in discourse and debated their musings.

Throughout the intervention, I felt the need to implement decisions that would enhance literacy growth. For instance, I embedded additional methods that created learners to think more in-depth regarding the literary elements they were learning about

and making connections to their life experiences. When the learners began to demonstrate deeper comprehension of themes or moral lessons from the texts (fairy tales), I reacted with learning opportunities that presented more cohesion lending to the holistic nature of the intervention. For instance, when I learned that the librarian was planning to teach lessons involving main idea and themes presented in texts, I asked her if we could team up together and teach the three-day unit within the library. In another instance, I incorporated multimedia forms so students could revisit the text and practice learning about the plot line elements. These types of opportunities present themselves frequently in the teaching world. Because, I was able to respond with a teachable moment along with the assistance of this specific colleague, the intervention enhanced my ability as an autonomous teacher.

Furthermore, in relation to constructivist theory, Vygotsky (1978) asserts that optimal learning occurs when teachers provide modeling and scaffolding strategies in support of students' zone of proximal development (Ness, 2011). The action research study enabled learners to activate prior knowledge, utilize speaking and listening skills, and distinguish between literary structural elements that are presented within fairy tales. The genre of fairy tales was chosen because it lends itself well to the emotional and moral perspectives that children grapple with during their own life experiences. Fairy tales teach students critical thinking skills and help students to understand the differences between right and wrong.

The purpose of this action research was to examine the effect of implementing my personal decisions to increase literacy achievement. Mertler (2017) asserts that when a teacher-researcher consistently acts as an observer there is an increased likelihood that

typical or atypical patterns emerge. Subsequently, spending time within the setting and interacting with the participants, the observations and engagements became routine occurrences throughout the research study.

General Findings and Results

The connections to quantitative and qualitative methods used throughout the study conform to an all-inclusive outcome. Due to the decisions that I made throughout the intervention it was evident that students gained literary meaning through the decisions I had made in connection to the overarching qualitative themes as well as quantitative results. Table 4.1 outlines the descriptive statistics that were calculated to reflect the results from the treatment and control groups. The groups' pretest and posttest means were calculated along with the range and standard deviation to supply empirical evidence. A paired samples *t*-test and independent samples *t*-tests were performed to gain insight into whether differences occurred among the two groups. Thus, findings under the qualitative methodology employed within this action research study are featured throughout the remainder of the chapter and later discussed through an analytical lens using the constructivist grounded theory approach.

Pre- and Post-Assessments

As I stated in Chapter 3, I implemented the teacher-developed pre- and posttests containing 10 multiple choice questions (See Appendix A), and each question was worth 10 points. In my district, a passing score is 60 percent or higher. Table 4.1 reveals the treatment group results after the hybrid-instructional intervention was administered. The treatment group revealed scoring an average of 3.25 points higher than the control group.

The posttest mean score from the treatment group was 6.95, and the posttest mean score from the control group was 3.7.

To ensure a normal distribution from the treatment group's posttest scores, I ran a kurtosis test in Excel and found that the kurtosis and skewness revealed a -0.83 and a -0.33, respectively. This indicated that these numbers were close to zero, and in the guide range of -2 to 2, which indicated that the data is relatively symmetrical.

The posttest results revealed that the treatment group grew one whole standard deviation after receiving the intervention (e.g. 2.4 -1.4). The treatment posttest results showed that the standard deviation's range dispersed higher scores away from the mean. Thus, 70% of the student-participants from the treatment group passed the posttest.

Table 4.1

Pretest and Posttest Results: Descriptive Statistics of Treatment & Control

Treatment Group Number (n) = 20	Control Group Number (n) = 19
Pretest Mean = 3.7	Pretest Mean = 3.0
Posttest Mean = 6.95	Posttest Mean = 3.7
Mean Difference = 3.25	Mean Difference = 0.68
Standard Deviation Pretest = 1.4	Standard Deviation Pretest = 1.3
Standard Deviation Posttest = 2.39 (rounded to 2.4)	Standard Deviation Posttest = 1.6
Range Pretest = 4	Range Pretest = 0
Range Posttest = 8	Range Posttest = 6

In contrast, the control group revealed very little growth, and most of the control participants did not pass the posttest. The posttest mean score of $3.7 - 3.0 = 0.7$ indicates that the mean increased by 0.07 of a point over a seven-week period, while the control

group engaged in the same set of literacy standards using the *Imagine It Reading Series*. The control group's standard deviation of 1.6 indicates that most of scores hovered around the mean of 3.7, demonstrating that most students did not pass the posttest after seven weeks. In speaking with my colleague (the control group's teacher) on a weekly basis, she was able to confirm her use of teaching standards commensurate with district mandates and assessing similar fictional narratives and fairy tales from the *Imagine It Series*. These parameters of implementing the same standards during our classroom instructional time were discussed and agreed upon at the beginning of the study as well.

Independent t Tests Results

The pre-assessment results of the treatment group (N = 20) resulted in the $M = 3.70$ and the (SD = 1.41). By comparison, the control group (N = 19) resulted in $M = 2.89$ and the (SD = 1.32) indicating not much difference in standard deviation. The Independent t test was performed showing equal variances with the p -value = .305 on the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. The two-tailed test indicated a .076 which is above the alpha of 0.05 indicating no statistical significance.

The post-assessment results of the treatment group (N= 20) was associated with receiving the hybrid-instructional intervention $M = 6.95$ (SD = 2.39). By comparison, the control group (N= 19) yielded a $M = 3.68$ (SD = 1.6). To test for significant difference among the groups, an independent t test was performed to compare the means. The Levene's Test for Equality of variances showed that the variances were equal across the groups, with the p -value of 0.59 larger than the alpha (0.05). The two-tailed test resulted in a .000, which is lower than alpha ($p < 0.05$) suggesting that there is a significant difference among the post-assessment mean scores.

Table 4.2

Whole Group Vocabulary and Discourse

Codes	Observation and Themes	Participant Quotes and Observation Comments (OC)
3-6-19 (whole group; pseudonyms were used)	Taught a whole group lesson on vivid vocabulary. Used chart with adjectives and action verbs. Words such as epic, huge, humongous, and beautiful were familiar to higher level readers.	Students shared adj, from the story. First time asking about higher- level vocab.
Discussion of adjectives	Students wrote down words on adj. journal page. Discussed descriptive and describe.	Courtney and Sophie, “he has long hair, he looks like a girl because he has long hair. Courtney “I saw one with a braid yesterday.” She makes a text to world connection – (motorcycle rally in town) They respond with princess she looks pretty.
Discussion with verbs	Went through story together and picked out the verbs. The “ed” suffix could change word from a noun to verb. (rescued, played, named, cried, invisible, raced, sprinted	Ricky said, beautiful. High interest in the vocab. cemented a better interest of how adj. describe nouns (hideous)
Improve written expression	Discussed whole group the physical attributes of the main characters.	Courtney
Discussion of Personality/Physical Traits	Students then were assigned to make illustrations of the characters by tracing each other (on large bulletin board paper) that they most identified with.	They saw stronger use of verbs and noticed the “ed” suffix.
Vocabulary development		Students without prompting could give examples of stronger verbs (Trey, Conner, Allen, and Matthew). Girls were quieter.
Text evidence discussion		
	Some students used text to text connections – related to things in their life. Jake mentioned Ice King from Fort Nite. Explained attributes of the character.	Fearless, muscular, rough, rugged, brave, cool. Why did the author make him look like this?
Discussion and comprehension		I mentioned using text evidence, but they did not quite understand what I meant. Had to review physical – the ”ph” sound and what physical means, related it to looks or appearance.
	Students engaged in a second reading of the fairy tale and an online video. Deeper level of thinking demonstrated	
Investment in work	Themes: cultural awareness – gender, stereotype, related to the dude.	Girls did not choose the princess and chose the dude – that was surprising to me.
		Each time that the story was presented, there was a high interest from both genders.

Table 4.2 accentuates five salient classifications extracted from primarily whole group instruction and emphasized in small group work that facilitated literacy comprehension: (a) vocabulary development, (stronger verbs, and adjectives), (b) improved comprehension (mediated through), (c) text-based discussions, (d) improved written expression skills, and (e) student investment (students emotionally attached to their work).

Throughout the intervention, I would observe students, engage in discussions, collect their work, and later reflect on the lessons. I sustained an active role as the participant observer, so that I could gain as many nuances as possible. However, in a natural setting, students move quickly and inevitably changes occur in almost every learning situation.

Through the data collection process of implementing unstructured observations coupled with collected student artifacts, I was able to gain in-depth understanding of my student participants reacting to the intervention, while capturing evidence that assisted me in answering my research question: How does a teacher's personal decision-making when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom?

Vocabulary

Through my personal decisions, I could focus on implementing the repetition of higher vocabulary usage. The themes that surfaced from the whole group instruction illustrated the need to explicitly teach and build students' knowledge before graduating to contextual application. For example, the repetitive use of the vocabulary and implementing this new vocabulary into their discussions demonstrated stronger word

choice that later transcended into their writing. For instance, our whole group discussion regarding the terms: physical attributes and personality traits were emphasized.

Directions: Cut out the words below and paste them under the correct category. Then write some of your own. Use any of these words for your physical and personality traits character/poster.

Personality Traits(character traits)		Physical Attributes	
intelligent	comical		tall
	kind		one-eyed
	selfish		muscular
	sassy		fragile
	clever		petite
	adventurous		long wavy hair
	pleasant		steely blue eyes
	stubborn		hideous
	confident		

Word Bank:

Figure 4.1 Personality traits and physical attributes.

These were very difficult words for many students, yet these words appear in various reading passages, standards, and assessments. When teaching the featured fairy tale, *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude*, I asked students why they thought it was necessary to use the text when describing a character's personality trait. Several students had good rationale: "So, we can see the what their personality is like, and how they feel, or how they think." Allen explained, "his personality trait is that he's fearless, brave, and independent." When discussing the physical attributes, students could grasp the concept of describing the physical appearance of the character(s). Adjectives such as, *rough skin*, *tough*, *long black hair*, *wears cool stuff*, *muscular*, and *buff*, were all descriptions of the cool motorcycle dude.

Improved comprehension. Through improved comprehension, I provided more opportunities of collaboration and as a result, students were taking more risks with other peers and engaging in deeper levels of critical thinking about the characters' feelings, actions, and the plot development. There were some uncomfortable feelings at first, but through my decisions that provided various learning modes to discuss the texts (i.e. talking chips) students were propelled into higher-level thinking modes and shared their thoughts.

Vygotsky (1978) was a firm believer that cultural influences and social interactions have huge effects on student learning. In the classroom, students can participate in learning through their individual backgrounds based on ethnicity, identity, and biological differences that facilitate further discussions related to the class material being taught (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Through this theoretical lens, I was able to decipher themes by having students engage with each other regarding additional fairy tales they were reading.

“The zone of proximal development is uncomfortable for students as learning by themselves transcends to learning by taking risks and trusting others” (Black & Allen, 2018, p. 82). Comprehension was improved when students discussed their thinking by collaboration. For example, Tables 4. 3 and 4.4 display students sharing the text-to-text connections and real-world connections. At first, the higher leveled readers could grasp when I said, “Use text-evidence to see why the author chose to describe a character in a specific way.” Struggling readers and average readers were reluctant in utilizing ‘text evidence,’ or didn’t want to refer to the text. This was a practice that was revisited many times; students were highly encouraged to utilize the text, ask one another questions as

they worked in making meaning of several text structures: compare, contrasting, author's point of view, plot and characters' feelings.

Text-based discussions. Because my goal was to reach as many learners as possible and sustain their interest, other narrative texts were introduced into the unit. Again, this was a situation where I felt empowered by implementing another picture book or mentor text during whole group instruction and then reinforcing comprehension skills through small group instruction. My aim was also to choose a story that had a different cultural theme, but one I thought all the students would enjoy.

Senorita Gordita by Helen Ketteman was a fractured fairy tale that I came across, and it is a spin-off from the traditional story, *The Gingerbread Man*. Through a compare/contrast learning activity, beginning with both books read aloud, followed by whole class discussions, and later practicing with text structures, deeper comprehension was observed. Many students found the story to be highly entertaining and saying the Spanish words were enjoyable. The Hispanic students in my classroom would giggle every time I would say words incorrectly and they would then pronounce the word(s) correctly for the class.

Because 20% of my class contained diverse backgrounds, I wanted to choose a narrative text (fairy tale) that incorporated a different culture. Moreover, based upon teaching students the text structures outlined by the standards, students began to understand that the characters, setting, plot, can all be altered if an author wishes it to be, yet the theme remains the same. This form of higher-level thinking creates critical readers and thinkers. Discussions evolved regarding the main characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions within each story. The students could visually see the cultural differences

appearing on the pages, characters looked different, but actions were similar, recognize the different settings (farm versus desert) and objects or events were slightly altered, (farm animals versus desert animals) forcing the readers to distinguish the alterations (See Table 4.6; Fairy Tale Themes).

Improved written expression. My personal-decision making led me to keep the end in mind so, I incorporated learning opportunities that engaged students utilizing variations of fairy tales, multimedia texts, and activities that mediated dialogue among peers. As a result, these personal decisions perpetuated the facilitation of answering my research question.

After whole group instruction, I would meet with small groups to focus on students' specific needs with writing skills. This is where small group instruction became the most valuable. Students and I could confer about their writing and focus on elements they needed. Scaffolded teaching was necessary, and the writing conference is the heart of teaching the writing process (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). I found this to be true! When I met with each small group, students articulated where they had the most trouble in getting their thoughts onto paper. According to Graves (2001) the act of talking about writing involves cognitive and social processes. During these conferences, I could focus on the needs of individual writers, and vary my responses according to the needs of early writers and fluent writers.

Table 4.3

Small Cooperative Groups for Point of View

Codes	Observation and Themes	Participant Quotes and Observation Comments
Discussion- Continued from whole group instruction of the boy narrator's point of view:	*I asked, "What was an example of the action from the story?"	Brian states, "Girls don't like gross things, but boys do." (He is referring to the ugly giant that the boy narrated. The illustration matches the boy's description of his version of the giant) Jake says, "boys like action, but so do some girls." Kylie agreed.
Text-based discussion.	Corey says, "the big battle and the volcanoes exploding."	Corey states, "Boys like fire too, they're not scared of stuff. Girls get scared. Conner says, "Boys don't like ponies, but girls do."
	*What is the boy's point of view? Why does he narrate the story in this way?	Corey, "Yeah, and they don't like pony meat, or cow meat. Ha Ha! They all laughed. He says, "Girls don't have courage to eat meat."
	*I ask the boys, "Why do you think girls don't like to eat meat?"	
	Conner, "They don't like to eat stuff that boys like." The beginning of stereotyping and gender issues are introduced. Boys seem to want to gain an advantage over each other. Brian is a follower and seeks approval from other boys.	Allen, "Well, she's royalty, because she's wearing a purple and pink long dress. She's beautiful and she has ponies." Courtney and Christy say that girls like unicorns; boys don't like unicorns. Courtney says, "My dad likes horses."
Text-based discussion	*How would you describe the girl's point of view?"	Matthew and Allen made an inference, "When girls are sad, they won't eat. If she's sad, she won't want to eat."
Comprehension – inferencing, referring to cultural aspects	Matthew explains that girls like horses more than boys do. He says if you like a unicorn, then you like a pony. Brian says, "Buttercup is a girl's name."	
Vocabulary and text-based discussion can stem from read aloud.	Brian "She also cried all day and was sad."	The students are making meaning from the story, but also interjecting cultural issues stereotypical descriptions. Courtney, "Yeah, when the giant stole the ponies, that caused her to cry. And she only had Buttercup left."
Improved Comprehension	Courtney, "I heard... I think a hyperbole." * Good job! You did; can you tell me what you heard and what it means? "I heard that before, "she thought her heart would break, it means she was so sad."	Matthew and Allen made an inference, "When girls are sad, they won't eat. If she's sad, she won't want to eat."
Comprehension and cultural aspects	*So, that could be a cause and effect relationship, maybe?	

In action research, multiple methods and data collections are employed to enhance validity, and triangulation is necessary in action research studies (Mertler, 2017). During the first stage of data collection, I employed the grounded theory methodology using an open coding system by assigning ‘bits’ of raw data and categorizing them using colored sticky notes (Mertler, 2014; Saldana 2016). The data collected was retrieved from the study participants’ classroom artifacts as well as participants’ discussions during unstructured observations. To maintain reflexivity while observing small groups, or small cooperative groups, I would video record specific standards-driven lessons. To capture the participants precise wording or phrases, I would either jot down notes in real time, or later I would as closely as possible, transcribe the videos into text. While reviewing my field notes, I would code the data based on repeating patterns that emerged. I noticed that some of the words were repetitive based upon students’ responses. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend that a constant comparative approach enables the researcher to transcend the raw data into comprehensive categories, known as axial coding. In addition, my role as a researcher was to be cognizant of my own thoughts and potential biases. To decrease any bias, I had to routinely check my positionality as the teacher and look through an objective lens.

Small group analysis: Themes. During the first phase of the intervention (4 weeks), I met with small groups after our whole group lesson (I split the Pelican group; 3-4 students) for approximately 30 minutes Monday through Thursday. My focus was to promote discussion and check for comprehension by posing questions. The participants, Ariel, Ricky, Patty, Kenny, and Emma (pseudonyms are used) had listened from the read-

aloud and were provided with their own copy of the modern fairy tale *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude* (O'Malley, 2005).

During our small group we focused on vocabulary, point of view, story sequencing and discussed the plot line. The themes that emerged from the small group interactions are depicted in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4. By utilizing the axial coding method, I was able to evaluate the students' learning and quote student participants' thoughts from their conversations with each other and me. According to Merriam & Tisdell, (2016) the actual themes the researcher comes up with can come from the teacher-researcher, the participants' quotes, and from the related literature. The themes that were gleaned from this action research study revealed five central findings: enhanced vocabulary development, text-based discussion, improved comprehension, improved written expression, and some cultural awareness aspects.

Table 4.4

Promoting Dialogic Discourse: Small Group with the Pelicans

Student	Sample Codes	Central Theme	Participant Quote and Interpretation
Ariel (Ike was absent)	Enhanced Vocabulary Development	Ariel states that she likes the princess because she is caring, and she is pretty.	<p>"I want to use the word, <i>beautiful</i> to describe Princess Rose when I write my own fairy tale story."</p> <p>Ariel has had much trouble with reading this year, but she does attend daily intervention. She was also identified as learning disabled (spring, 2019). She loves to be read to and wants to improve. She said she wants to improve her writing by using stronger adjectives. One of her favorite fairy tales is <i>Little Mermaid</i>.</p>
Emma and Patty	Cultural Awareness	Emma and Patty recognize the genders as bantering in the story.	
	Text-based discussions	Making meaning of the text through text-based discussions.	

Kenny and Ricky	Invested in the work. Discussion with peers to sequence events and making- meaning.	*I ask: How did the story begin? (He retells without the book)	Patty says, “We see the boy’s opinion first and then the girl’s opinion, the giant comes and steals the last pony.” Emma states, “Well, she doesn’t really steal, because the dude says he’ll guard the last pony. Acknowledge that the boy and girl are telling the story.
Kenny and Ricky	The boys use text-based discussion to make meaning. They help and coach one another to retell and sequence the major events.	*Why would the Dude guard the ponies?	Kenny says, “they were fighting over who was telling the story. I say, “Yes, that’s how the story begins.” Kenny, “I mean the princess does, she has eight ponies and every night...? He gets a little confused. Ricky hints about the boy narrator and looks back in the book.
	Ricky looks in the text, (would not do that before). Encourages his partner to use text and helps with hints – semiotic tools used for dialogic discussion	Ricky coaches, “Which one?”	He tells Kenny, it starts with an “N.” (narrator) You said, Buttercup, Kenny remembers and says, “One night one of the ponies got stolen. ‘Jasmie,’ she got stolen, and there was only one pony left; and the Dude came out of nowhere.” These two boys have exhibited more oral comprehension by explaining their thinking and their interpretation of the characters’ motivations. More risk-taking was demonstrated once students realized that dialogue was integral of learning, so they seemed to get more comfortable with explaining their ideas to one another. I saw investment in their work begin to develop as well when they were working on the story map and plot line.

Often, struggling readers do not like to reread texts and locate information from text, however once students felt safe within the small group setting, more risk-taking

evolved. For instance, the exchange between Ricky and Kenny in Table 4.4 illustrates the benefits of dialogic discourse. During their discussion, I minimally offered posing questions and listened to how they negotiated meaning from the story's events. I could see that the boys were more confident with reciting the events and retelling the plot. They struggled with some of the words, but later were able to retell the events without looking back into the story. Moreover, Kenny completed his story map with minimal guidance from me, and although some of his written sentences are incomplete and words are misspelled, he demonstrated understanding the story's plot line.

Dialogic Discourse

Dialogic discourse involves the central emphasis that the semiotic tool of language is placed on verbal and social interactions among learners. My personal-decision making led me to keep the end in mind so, I incorporated learning opportunities that engaged students utilizing variations of fairy tales, multimedia texts, and activities that mediated dialogue among peers. As a result, more risk taking was evident, and students in the small groups began to refer to the texts and reread the same books. As they participated in small group settings, they felt safe in sharing their perspectives. In addition, I would reflect on the posttest and the literary elements I wanted them to master by providing them with practice through small group and whole group interactions. These personal decisions perpetuated the facilitation of answering my research question.

Table 4.5

Small Writing Groups

Codes: Dates: 4-01 and 4-05	Themes	Participant Quotes and Interpretation
Enhanced vocabulary development	Discussion: Sharing of ideas in changing the plot of the featured fairy tale, Once Upon a...	Trey – fluent reader in the expo- the characters are kind, ruby red mansion, rising action is ponies and says their names, climax is the huge battle; giant found out that there was a witch and a wizard.
Improved comprehension	Emerging signs of risk taking in their writing, especially with word choice, generating ideas, and synthesized by writing their own version of the fairy tale.	
Text-based discussions	Matthew had a solid understanding of synthesizing the fairy tale by creating new events and characters. solid beginning, the spelling, grammar, sentence structure chose better words fast- changed to speedy, simile used. Risk taking, vocabulary enhanced.	Similes: Plural – cute as kittens, Trey understood the moral lessons. “Even a hideous looking giant can always help people.” Students developed a sense of moral conduct from the story. Also implement higher-level vocabulary (i.e. unconscious, massive, and epic). Students recognize and begin to use words to convey meaning. Similes were recognized from other stories and used in writing.
Improved comprehension- Improved vocabulary	I asked group: “Where do authors get ideas from?”	
Kylie’s exposition was good with rich vocab. New names, good character traits, one night, for transition. Could articulate her thought process and demonstrated risk taking by changing the plot and characters’ actions.	Synthesis- Changed the exposition to, Once upon a time there lived a princess- her name was Princess Diamond Heart. Also changed the animals, names, the problem remained the same, (three giants steal the animals), the Dude is knocked out, (climax). The main character solves the problem by wearing a cape and he is fast (invisible) He mostly scares them; three giants.	Matthew said, “book, imagination”, others say “books.” Jake says, “Your brain! and different stories and other fairy tales.”
Improved comprehension	She struggled at first, but by rereading the text she was able to grasp the purpose of recreating events and writing a fractured fairy tale.	Kylie says, “I’m making mine opposite from the original story.” The climax will be the epic battle, and the Dudette got knocked out. The prince battles the dragon.
Sophie (read aloud) added two new events, the exposition; the Dude was coming for the giant.”		She says, “I love writing!” You can make up your own fairy tale, I didn’t know that?

Table 4.6

Small Cooperative Groups: Theme Lessons

Codes = *Teacher	Themes	Participant Quotes
Improved comprehension	Collaboration with peers to help make meaning.	Cody said, "That's definitely theme." Mike says, "the main idea is like the big idea of the story; it tells you a lesson to learn."
*How do you determine the main idea from the theme? * Can you give me an example?	Trey is articulate in his explanation, and Sophie listens intently. Trey explains his thinking to Sophie in assisting her with the concept of theme.	Trey says, "The theme is the life lesson...like never give up on something that is really important to you; like if you really want something you shouldn't give up on it and work hard for it."
*Sophie, can you read me a card from your pile? I asked, "Do you think it's theme or main idea?"	I asked her to tell my why she thought the example was theme. Travis asks her, "Is it what it's mostly about, or is it giving a lesson?"	Sophie read an example, "Mary likes football, but she also like to dress up in fancy clothes." She says, "I think it's theme."
Improved Comprehension (continued)	Sophie struggled here, but Trey was helpful to her in asking her to think about what life lessons are. Sophie practiced reading some more examples.	
*What's the difference between main idea and theme?	Improved comprehension by using dialogue between partners in small group	Mark and Ryan each say, "Because theme teaches a moral lesson (Mark), and main idea is what the story is about (Ryan)." "The theme teaches the moral lesson in fairy tales." (Mark)
*Why do we need moral lessons?"	Makes connection to the concept of theme.	Courtney, "So we learn what to do, and what's right to do and what's wrong."
* I ask Courtney, "Can you think of another book that taught you a moral lesson from our fairy tale unit?"	Connecting theme to other relatable fairy tales. Recognizes the concept, even though the characters, setting, and actions are different. Compare and contrasting two fairy tales, identifying the same theme.	Courtney, "Yes, the Spanish book. Umm... <i>Senorita Gordita</i> . The book said to be smart, not fast, because if you're fast and you rush through a test you could get a bad grade."
*Why do we need moral lessons?"	Students begin to understand what moral lessons are and how different fairy tales, traditional	*Did the other text teach that theme?" "Yes, she replies." What was it? <i>The Gingerbread Man</i> . Mark asks her, "Did that teach the moral lesson?"

<p>Ricky and Jake</p> <p>*Now think about stories; do some stories teach a theme; a life lesson?</p> <p>*Who showed teamwork in that story?</p> <p>They both agreed on something; do you guys remember what it was?</p> <p>*Can you apply that to your own life?</p> <p>"If we've been bad at something, can we choose to do better?"</p>	<p>or modern can teach learners life lessons.</p> <p>Relates theme to cultural things</p> <p>Increased comprehension through dialogic discourse; more details were provided through oral comprehension</p> <p>Makes connections (inferences) of theme to other texts. Ricky brings up the library lesson, on <i>The Bad Seed</i>. He subtly relates the theme to himself.</p>	<p>Courtney says, the theme is the same, but the characters were different."</p> <p>Ricky, "The theme is like if you go to a birthday party, and a bunch of stuff is the same...like a bunch of pirate stuff."</p> <p>Jake says, "<i>The Cool Motorcycle Dude</i> teaches us to use teamwork."</p> <p>Ricky states, "The girl and the boy were arguing over who was going to free the ponies a and scare the giant off the cliff.</p> <p>Ricky, "They both agreed on how to end the story." Ricky, "The Bad Seed was bad, but just because you're bad, doesn't mean you can't be good."</p> <p>He nods, "yes." *Yeah, we sure can! I like the way you participated today!"</p>
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The exchanges featured during the theme lessons through small cooperative groups demonstrated students sharing ownership in making meaning from the texts. In dialogic discourse, the flow of conversation between students and teacher, or student to student "enables students to position themselves as both agents and negotiators of meaning making" (Pennell, 2015). From acting as the facilitator and posing questions, I could see students were beginning to make other connections to stories and make inferences. They were successful in understanding the concept of theme by working with a partner to understand the moral lessons (implications) that authors can present through

fairy tales and the characters' actions. Through dialogic discussions, it was evident that the struggling readers (Ricky, Emma, Kenny, and Patty) could demonstrate comprehending abstract concepts through the environment of dialogic discourse.

Addressing Research Question with Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Daily, teachers use their professional judgment by combining instructional strategies such as direct instruction followed by small group instruction to meet their students' needs. This section reveals the impact of triangulation and specific data sets that were integral in highlighting consistency when answering the research question: How does a teacher's personal decision-making when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom?

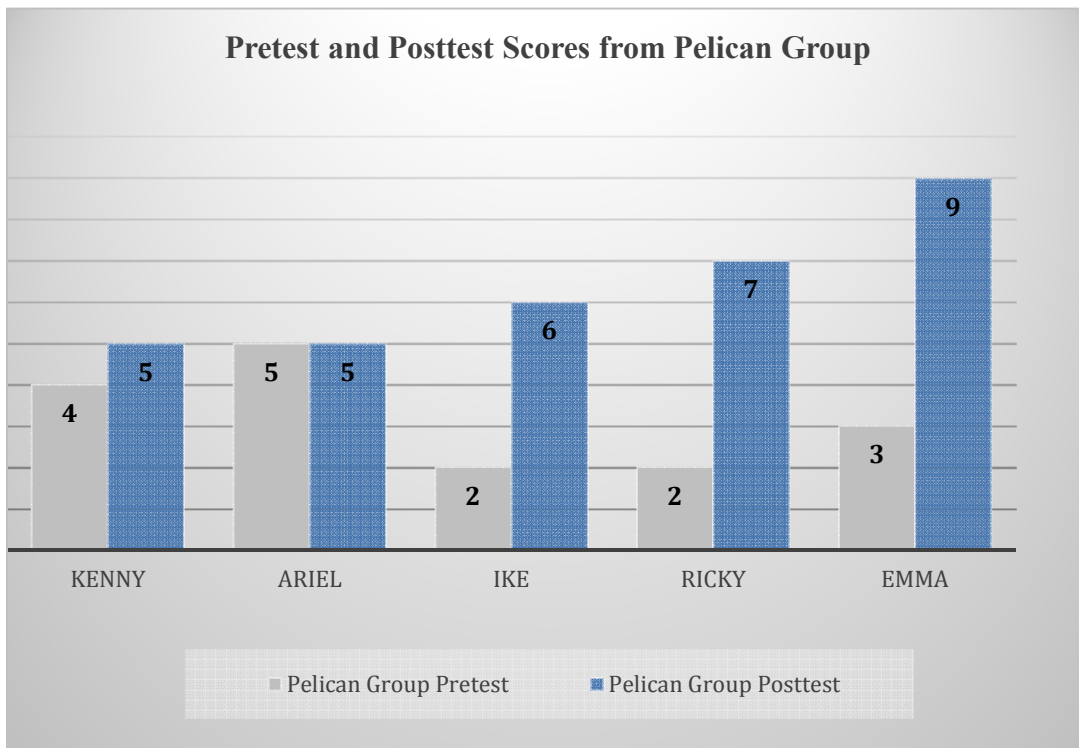


Figure 4.2. Pretest and posttest scores from pelican group.

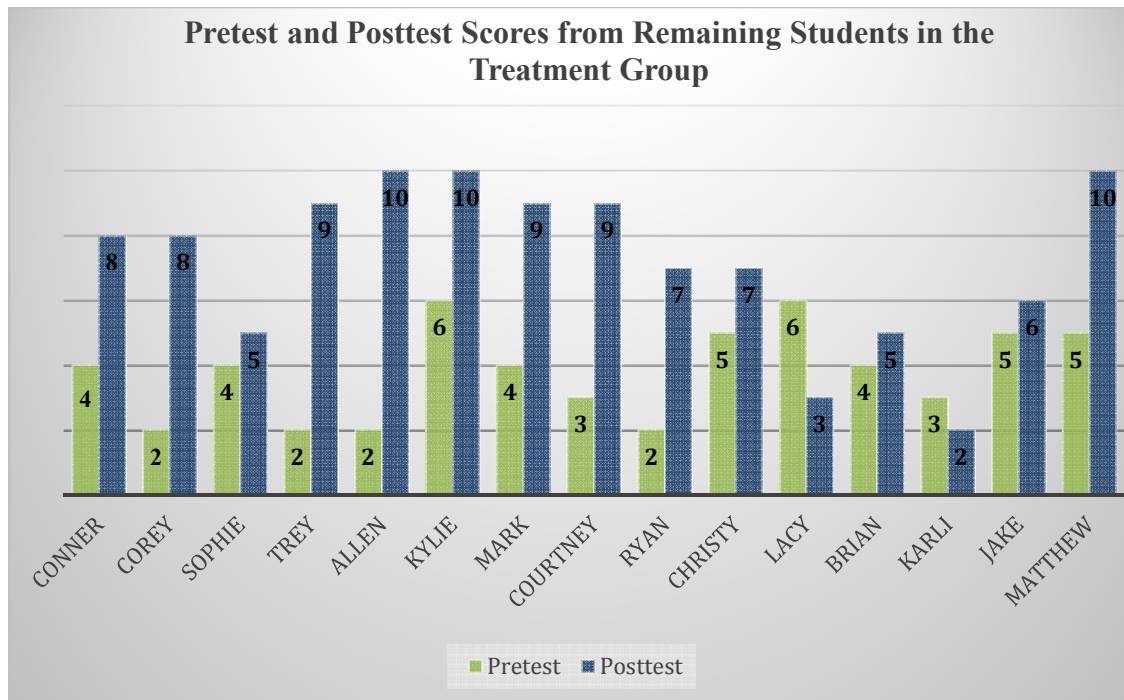


Figure 4.3. Pretest and posttest scores from remaining students.

Quantitative Results

The pre- and posttest assessment data featured in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 display the entire treatment groups' (Pelicans (subgroup), Loggerheads 1 & 2 and Carolina Wrens 3 & 4) individual scores (pseudonyms are assigned for each student's score). The posttest assessment revealed 12 of the 20 students tested, scored 70 percent or higher (dark blue). There was a significant difference in the treatment group scores for the pre- and posttests ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.41$) after the intervention ($M = 6.95$, $SD = 2.39$) conditions; $t(19) = 4.78$, $p = 0.00031$. Based upon the posttest results, the treatment group did improve their literacy achievement after receiving the hybrid-instructional delivery. Specifically, the results suggest that when students participate in the hybrid-instructional approach, literacy achievement is positively impacted.

Qualitative Results

Although, there were two students who scored lower than their pretest score, their classroom artifacts and discussions were helpful in ascertaining whether they had improved with the literary content. Except for Patty (did not complete the pretest), the Pelican Group had also made vocabulary and comprehension gains from the intervention. For instance, in reviewing Figure 4.2, three out of the five students scored a 60 percent or higher. These findings led me to believe that the qualitative methodology played an equally beneficial role in contributing to the literacy learning that occurred during this intervention.

Contrarily, Lacy and Karli, who are both average-high learners were a bit of a surprise to me in that their posttest scores went down, substantially. However, from experience, I have witnessed both girls perform poorly on other multiple-choice assessments as well – they may not take tests well. Karli is a very good student, and thorough with her work, yet she tends to overthink concepts. As mentioned earlier in this report, Lacy suffers from severe emotional factors and was recently diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Incidentally, both students wrote very detailed fairy tales, with recreating characters and events. Lacy insisted that she would complete the assignment on her own time, which meant that she would miss other critical assignments. This was a battle that I couldn't fight, so I allowed her to complete the story as she pleased. I was also instructed by my supervisor to refrain from any coercion.

By having the freedom to incorporate the hybrid-instructional approach, I had time to devote to text-based discussions, and written expression through small groups. I

was able to make informative decisions, adjust assignments, check for understanding, and I could evaluate whether these students improved their literacy skills. My four ELL students: Allen, Christy, Emma, and Ricky demonstrated gains on the posttest results as well, and their results are displayed in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.

Overall Summarization Related to Research Question

Direct (whole class) and small group instruction has been around for years, but it is the way in which a teacher employs the strategies that can make all the difference. The qualitative evidence led me to the conclusion that my students had improved and gained knowledge in literacy skills relating to specific standards, vocabulary development, improved comprehension from text-based discussions, and personal investment within their writing. A statement made by Donald Graves (2001) reflects my work as a teacher-researcher. He states, “the standards movement has led to less responsiveness to children...I have no quarrel with goals, but I don’t like immediate objectives that channel children too quickly and take away from the teachers the power to make the most of the moment” (p. 28).

Based upon the implementation of the hybrid-instructional approach, I was able to make the most of every moment. Because action research is a reflective process (Mertler, 2014), I was able to reinforce specific literacy skills when and where they were needed. My personal interests in these students and an immersed passion into the techniques I employ as an educator are relevant characteristics that yield results in student achievement. My intuition and passion served me well, and it was the release of the notion that a “one size fits all” curriculum did not make sense. Although, I still have much more to learn, I also have gained a clear vision of what I want my future

classrooms to look like. Teachers have powerful influence and are the ultimate decision makers for the students' academic growth.

In relating to literary text concepts and elements, the overall class participants demonstrated higher confidence with understanding the sequence of events, plot, and characterization. Through the discussions and classroom artifacts, I began to witness better comprehension regarding how students negotiated text structures through text-based discussions. The vocabulary development was a fluid theme that appeared numerous times; students would take risks in using advanced words, saying them, deciphering and confirming definitions, and incorporating them into their own writing.

With the fairy tale unit, we discussed the genre and how the stories contained moral and life lessons; the conflict of good versus evil, and the stereotypes that exist within in our culture. There was evidence of personal ownership and personal investment demonstrated through discussions and while developing their own stories from beginning to end. The students' reactions, and the investment they placed into their writing pieces were informative artifacts (See Appendix G).

Students across most, if not all groups, (See Tables 4.4 and 4.5) were articulate when I asked them to explain their story plans. Most could and were eager in applying higher-leveled vocabulary to their "*My Crazy Fairy Tale*." They checked for understanding by proofreading and sharing ideas with each other and with me. In addition, I supplied assistance to the Pelican Group by scaffolding the writing tasks, assisted with spelling, and provided them as well as the entire class with a writing checklist that guided the process (See Appendix D).

Because of small group interactions, the language and vocabulary were mediated through co-construction among the group members. Students were encouraged to use semiotic tools of language by discussing their perceptions of the stories they read. They were asked to think about characters' motivations and how the author exuded those feelings. This was the first time they had to think critically of what the author was trying to convey. (See Table 4.6). By collaboration and co-constructing meaning through the small groups, students became invested in their learning. Specifically, students became personally invested with their own writing (See Appendix F).

In summary, by utilizing a hybrid-instructional approach, students reap the benefits from both strategies- whole group and small group instruction. In fact, Marzano (1991) claimed that students who actively engage in verbal exchanges about their learning increase their level of thinking. Through this action research study, I witnessed multiple students extending their thinking beyond the level of abstraction. Some students stretched themselves more than others, yet it was clear that at whatever level of reading, writing, listening, and discussing, students' literacy skills had improved.

Supplemental Analysis: Student Perceptions




Because action research lends itself well to the research practitioner gaining clear and in-depth analysis of a specific setting, I concluded my research with a few additional methods and instruments that helped me in gauging whether the students felt they made literary gains from the hybrid-instructional approach. Consequently, I did have concern with bias, so I created a survey that reflected the participants' perceptions.

Students anonymously completed a survey displayed in Table 4.7 conveying their perceptions of learning about the literary concepts. Out of the 21 students, 20 participants

completed the survey. The table below reveals student perceptions based on a rating scale from one to three; three representing the most confidence while participating during the hybrid-instructional intervention.

Table 4.7

Students' Perceptions: Survey of Hybrid Approach

Rating Scale	1-No, I don't get it! 	2 – I'm still not sure if I get it? 	3 – Yes, I get it! 
I can write better vocabulary words and add them to my writing.	4 (20%)	4 (20%)	12 (60%)
I feel I could write a good story with a beginning, middle, and ending.	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	15 (75%)
I feel I learn best with the whole group.	4 (20%)	4 (20%)	12 (60%)
I feel I learn best while in small groups.	6 (30%)	3 (15%)	11 (55%)
I like the fantasy genre (fairy tales).	2 (10%)	10 (50%)	8 (40%)
I know how to find the life lesson or theme in a fairy tale.	2 (10%)	7 (35%)	11 (55%)
I know what character traits are.	2 (10%)	4 (20%)	13 (65%)
I understand how main characters affect the plot.	5 (25%)	9 (45%)	6 (30%)
I know the characters' feelings, thoughts, and what actions do to the plot.	3 (15%)	6 (30%)	11 (55%)
I understand the different points of view (1 st & 3 rd person).	2 (10%)	8 (40%)	10 (50%)

From my perspective there was ample evidence indicating that students felt more confident when utilizing vivid vocabulary (12 out of 20 students), writing a story with beginning, middle, and ending (15 out of 20 students), positively identifying character traits (13 out of 20 students), characters' thoughts, feelings and emotions earned 11 points out of 20, point of view (10 out of 20), with eight students indicating they were unsure about their learning of point of view.

In terms of the questions asking students' perceptions of how they feel they learn best, 12 out of 20 students claimed high confidence with whole group learning, while 11 out of 20 students reported they felt small group settings were best. Students who struggled with reading and writing were much more confident in sharing their thoughts during small group instruction. Only eight students indicated a strong liking to the genre of fairy tales, but one assumption I drew is that they could have felt completely saturated from the seven weeks of learning about princesses, giants, good versus evil, and life lessons.

Parent Engagement Increased Student Investment

In closing the fairy tale unit, I invited parents to come to our Authors Chair. Parents were invited to the classroom to listen to their child read the final version of their crazy fairy tale aloud. The students were very excited about sharing their fairy tales, and I was thrilled to see Ariel's confidence improve. (See Appendix H). She insisted on reading her story aloud with her grandmother and parents in attendance; something she would never have done before! This culminating activity validated many students' writing experiences by illustrating alignment with social-cultural implications based on Bakhtin's theory of dialogic discourse and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. From these

theories coupled with the learning activities I observed, I was able to glean the importance of social collaborative learning. Although these students were learning at different levels, the interpersonal collaboration generated richer personal understandings and promoted greater transfer for all (Black & Allen, 2018). Through this practice, I was able to set the tone that all voices within the learning community have value.

Conclusion

In summation of the data analysis, I was able to answer my research question: How does a teacher's personal decision-making when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom?

The intervention appears to be a success, since students demonstrated gains on the posttest of narrative and literary elements with 70 percent of the treatment group scoring a passing score of 60 percent or higher. Moreover, students demonstrated higher confidence levels by engaging in deeper modes of conversation. Frequent opportunities of implementing whole group lessons mediated higher-leveled vocabulary usage into their specific writing tasks. Students began to see the importance of utilizing the texts to discuss character traits, argue viewpoints, compare/contrast texts, and infer the characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions. I attribute this growth to the story mapping and plot line activities we did during whole group and small group settings.

Overall, student investment was evident with the sense of ownership and pride accentuated during the Author's Chair and the students' synthesis in recreating events from our featured fairy tale *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude*. (See Appendix H). By having the freedom to incorporate dialogic discourse, text-based discussions, and written

expression through small groups, I was able to make informative evaluations in whether these student-participants improved their literacy skills.

Chapter 5

Summary and Discussion

In Chapter 5, the teacher-researcher presents the summary and conclusion of the disseminated data followed by an Action Plan. The chapter begins with revisiting the purpose of this action research study, followed by the development and execution of the Action Plan. In conclusion, the role of the teacher-researcher's leadership philosophy, recommendations, and final remarks of the research experience will be discussed.

Discussion and Overview

The purpose of the action research study was to explore the effectiveness of implementing a teacher-developed literacy curriculum unit. This personal quest was accompanied by the teacher-researcher's reflections regarding the best practices that contribute to improving student literacy achievement. The action research was designed to meet the deeper thinking aspects of literary content aligned with the South Carolina Ready Assessment (SC READY) literacy standards. From this query, the teacher-researcher posed the following question: How does the teacher's personal decisions when implementing literacy skills through a hybrid-instructional approach impact student achievement in a second-grade classroom? The significance of this action research was to reveal the outcomes of using small group and whole class instructional methods. As a teacher researcher, I began to reflect on the obsession of high stakes test scores and meeting district curriculum demands without the consideration of teacher autonomy. I

wondered why pre-scripted materials and mandated initiatives could override pedagogical skills sets of teachers making decisions for the very people they interact with – their students. Because teachers must adhere to district mandates, maintain high test scores, and keep up with rapid pacing guides, teachers lack control in choosing the best instructional practices that foster student achievement. Moreover, SCRS has created a sense of urgency for second grade teachers as well. The law states that third-grade students who do not pass the SC READY state standardized reading test will be retained the following school year in order to catch up (Bowers, 2017). As a second- grade teacher, I felt compelled to examine my instructional methods to help students reach deeper levels of reading comprehension. The challenge and pressures are real once again in second grade as it was when teacher-researcher was assigned to teaching testing grades in previous years.

By reviewing educational literature and seminal works, I discovered that the absence of teacher decision-making on key issues such as grappling with hyper-standardization, over-sized curriculum, and maintaining a swift pace thwarts student-teacher relationships and student achievement. In addition, the current standardized assessment approaches do not fully represent what children know (Graves, 2001; Good, 2005). According to Graves (2001), the expectation that students comprehend immediate objectives derails the teacher's ability to manipulate instructional strategies. In other words, teachers need the flexibility and time to stay in those teachable moments. Thus, the importance of teachers making those decisions of when to implement their delivery is critical. Linda Darling-Hammond (2014) reports the results from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) that American teachers work much harder under

more challenging conditions than other teachers in the industrial world. She posits, “American teachers work more hours than their global counterparts, cope with larger classroom sizes, and spend a great deal of time helping children and families while trying to close learning gaps” (blog post). Teachers must be empowered to adapt instructional strategies, build positive teacher-student relationships, and provide students with the support mechanisms needed to reach academic goals.

Research Findings

The significance of this action research study revealed the success of a teacher’s personal decision-making incorporating a hybrid-instructional approach by implementing whole group and small group instructional methods to improve literacy achievement. The mixed-methods design enabled rigorous analysis of the collected data. In response to the intervention, data results revealed that 70 percent of the entire treatment group passed or mastered the posttest assessment compared to 11 percent of the control group (students in another second-grade classroom who participated in standardized curriculum and instruction).

In addition, recent research claims that small group instruction is considered one of the best practices with teaching reading in elementary schools today (Shanahan, 2014). Small group instruction can be a powerful instructional method. For instance, a large study conducted by Sorensen and Hallinan (1986) found that 30 minutes of small group instruction versus 30 minutes of whole class teaching revealed that the students in the small group made larger gains. However, Shanahan (2018) asserts that these researchers found that the small group teaching revealed that the students had fewer learning

opportunities. The inferences were made that teachers simply teach more when teaching the whole class.

As the participant observer, my quest was to discover how making critical decisions of when and how to teach specific learning goals using the hybrid approach would be the most beneficial to my learners. I made decisions at pivotal times during instruction (whether to implement whole group instruction, small group instruction, and small cooperative group instruction), to ascertain if my students would improve their literacy skills. Shanahan (2018) asserts that it isn't wise to group just for the sake of grouping based on reading levels, but use groups to focus on different learning tasks, or to follow-up whole class instruction. Through my research, I found this to be true; with the hybrid-instructional approach, I could plan specific whole group lessons and later customize learning tasks conducive to learners' goals.

Throughout the seven-week period, I collected a variety of data points that enabled me to answer my research question, which included student artifacts from whole group, small group, and small cooperative group instruction. Observations were recorded and then transferred into written form where I could interpret and analyze students' perceptions. I kept a research journal that enabled me to write specific notes and my interpretations of students' discourse with their peers and me. Mertler (2017) contends that exposing students to an instructional "treatment" or intervention may be necessary in measuring changes within the design and purpose of the study. My quantitative data was generated from the pre- and posttest assessments that helped me to analyze the hybrid – instruction effectiveness by performing independent t tests and a paired samples t test. At the conclusion of the study, the qualitative evidence was analyzed using a comparative

approach by employing open axial coding, which enabled me to generate themes that occurred and assisted me in answering my research question.

Reflection

Not long ago, I viewed the meaning of literacy in a very simplistic form; to be literate means to be proficient in reading and writing. However, after the many theories we learned throughout this program, and the pedagogical approaches that each theory or framework provides to educators, I realize now that teachers will always need to stretch and build their teaching. When I think about all the different forms of literacy and how each domain can foster young readers as well as older ones, I am overwhelmed with the choices we can make within our practice(s).

As the teacher researcher, I discovered that literacy has an unspoken social component, almost an innate trait that every individual within a society possesses. The constructs that we communicate by are brought upon from social, cultural, historical, and political processes (Larson and Marsh, p. 7). Being literate is more than just being able to read and write well, thus holding proficient status. Literacy entails a societal aspect that includes consideration with the understanding of other perspectives, authentic learning experiences, building upon learners' linguistic and literary repertoires that extends their thinking (Larson & Marsh, 2015).

Throughout this endeavor, I learned that literacy is much more than just having the ability to read and write; "literacy is the embodiment of learning language, language development, cognition, observing, participating, speaking/listening, social interactions, language skills, culture, history, and societal implications." The compilation of all these attributes is what makes one literate. The action research journey made me realize that

being literate has many facets; we can acquire literacy through participating within our world and by formal and intentional pedagogical practices (Larson & Marsh, 2015). Teachers have an enormous task in being intuitive as they plan instruction and choose meaningful and engaging texts.

Finally, the journey of action research within my classroom has been an awakening. Due to the increased professional knowledge and skill sets I gained from this experience I realize that maybe I was empowered all along. I must not be fearful anymore! The people that hold higher positions may have good intentions, but it is the sheer passion from a dedicated teacher that can yield results. Many teachers in the field have a passion that exudes every day, and by participation in action research endeavors can only increase teacher knowledge. Action research allows for passionate teachers to implement classroom hypotheses by testing and examining their pedagogy of what works and what does not (Farrell and Weitman, 2007). Action research led me to embrace the fact that I can reconnect myself as a dedicated educator if I choose to, and I can promote to other colleagues the professional knowledge that is gained.

Leadership Philosophy

As part of action research, I embraced the responsibility of sharing the outcomes from my study. The cyclical nature of the action research enabled me to be the active participant as observer of my study.

Because my problem of practice was based on the potential effects from the implementation of the literacy-based hybrid approach; students, parents, and stakeholders can benefit from the outcomes. As a teacher leader, I had the opportunity in learning

alongside my students, and I could accentuate my leadership behaviors when necessary (Northouse, 2016).

The results of my study shed light on the importance of teachers being empowered in relying on their own professional repertoire and pedagogy in serving students. In addition, the behavioral approach of leadership was conducive to my action plan as well, since the trials and tasks that I implemented directly impacted my followers (students). Northouse (2016) describes this behavioral approach as two-dimensional: how leaders interact with their followers will impact what the followers produce. Hence, another important aspect under behavioral leadership, was that I could continuously assess my own actions as I navigated and evaluated the practices that affected students' learning goals. Having both realms of leadership paradigms enabled me the flexibility and freedom to create a highly productive learning environment. Northouse (2016) described this as transformational leadership, a paradigm that contains an intrinsic component by providing heightened motivation and an emphasis on morality in both the leader and the followers.

Farris-Berg (2016) contends that there is a growing transformation among educators, and research supports the benefits to students when teachers are empowered in making school-wide decisions. "When classroom teachers model best practices and develop professional expertise, they become effective teacher leaders, because they see leadership as their duty and their due" (Meredith, 2007). As the leader in my classroom, I welcome the experience as well as the challenge in bypassing the "*teacher fixing initiatives*," and implementing my own pedagogical skill sets. Again, I embrace the responsibility, and I will initiate *change* through the choices I make as a curriculum

leader. As a teacher leader within my classroom, I could empower myself and implement the hybrid-instructional approach, which coincided with the transformational leadership paradigm, thus creating a safe atmosphere where students can collaborate about their learning with each other and take pride in their work (Northouse, 2016).

As the teacher leader, within the classroom setting, I realized that building a strong relationship with my students would most likely yield greater returns. Through my action research study, I examined the impact my decisions had made on my students' learning. According to Graves, "when teachers allow students time for discourse, students are engaged in their learning" (p 28). As a teacher leader, I learned alongside my students and improved or accentuated my leadership behaviors when necessary (Northouse, 2016). For instance, in the small group settings, I was able to scaffold writing skills with students: having students read their writing aloud, making necessary revisions, discussing the topic and details, understanding point of view, and considering their audience. These were only a few of the multi-faceted components that were part of small group interactions. As an empowered teacher leader, I provided spontaneous feedback which led to higher levels of student motivation and student achievement.

Results Related to Existing Literature

Beginning in the early twentieth century, educational theorists have constructed various educational theories, practices, and methods. Culturally, Dewey envisioned an egalitarian, unrestricted school system in which all students, no matter, race, color, gender, or creed could enjoy a free and public education. Dewey believed that literacy was a direct connection to the occupations that served not only his curriculum theory, but it permeated into his vision of an ideal society (Kliebard, 1995). To Dewey, the teachers

were essential in delivering the curriculum, “it is after all the teacher who alone can make that course of study a living reality...and “as long as the teacher, who is after all the only real educator in the school system” (p. 75).

Vygotsky (1978) believed that there are psychological tools that the child brings to the learning. Since language is utilized as a cultural tool, learners construct meaning and enhance cognitive behavior; the learner acquires more effective strategies when interacting with situations, which evolve in the sociocultural community (Petrova, 2013). Thus, these ‘cultural tools’ underscored in Vygotsky theory empower learners because of the relationship between language and the psychological development of the learner when learners engage in social interaction (Perry, 2012; Petrova, 2013; Powell, et.al; Black & Allen, 2018; & Padmanabha, 2018).

In addition, sociocultural theory focuses on the procedure of applying social interaction with an emphasis on instruction that is mediated through a collaborative approach (Hodges, et.al, 2016). These theories and practices were implemented within my study, and I found that my students were more willing to share their thoughts and articulate their thinking in meaningful ways. According to Marzano, (1991) students who actively engage in verbal exchanges about their learning increase their level of thinking.

The combination of direct instruction of whole group and small group instruction yielded a safe atmosphere where my students felt comfortable and more willing to ask questions that strengthened their literacy comprehension. Farrell and Weitman (2007) assert that when teachers are involved with action research queries, they move along a continuum from risk-taking to a sense of self-efficacy. After the triangulation of my data,

and critical analysis of my teaching practices, I could safely say that these tested queries revealed valuable information.

Recommendations

The information garnered from this action research study revealed that the hybrid-instructional approach had a positive impact on students' literacy achievement. By use of the various data points, the students made gains in literary concepts during the seven- week period. Based on the findings, the researcher could present these results to administration, colleagues, parents, and others in the education field. The presentation and sharing of the instructional methods used through professional development opportunities from the school level through the state level would allow educators to realize the impact of a hybrid-approach in a greater capacity.

As an agent of change, I am faced with the charge of battling bureaucrat practices on a small, yet significant scale. The place and the position I hold as the teacher leader within my classroom affords me the ability to activate that change in systemic steps. Although I am bound by the restraints based on the bureaucratic model of governance, my mission is to create positive change by implementing effective practices deemed necessary in promoting student achievement (Brubaker, 2014). I understand that bureaucracy will always be present, however I can make colleagues aware of their personal decisions that can impact student achievement.

Students of the 21st century will be challenged in creating societal changes that may improve or enhance our society, our culture, and perhaps other cultures as well. Because of the various literary theories and new capabilities due to modern technology and multimodal texts and content, literacy learners embrace problems and can create

solutions culturally as well as politically. By providing engaging literary activities, readers can think purposefully. They can analyze the pertinent issues that raise social awareness and perhaps produce change. Largely due to the theories of digital literacy and critical literacy, young people across the globe can connect and help one another in making decisions.

In addition, the outcomes of my study could give fellow colleagues the pedagogical tools that reinforce students' literacy comprehension. Parents could benefit in gaining the perspective that their child has been exposed to a curricula unit of study that encompassed deeper levels of comprehension. Stakeholders may acquire an interest of the study's results; these conclusions could be shared with other educators who are seeking to improve students' literacy skills. In collaboration with fellow colleagues we are actively employing ways to create an equitable culture. By having students reflect on experiences via conversations or sharing through writing experiences, I plan to incorporate a classroom culture where ELL students feel comfortable and valued in the classroom. As an educator in the public- school setting, it is my responsibility and obligation to provide opportunities for all students, no matter of race, gender, ethnic background, religion, or class. Educators must constantly examine their own value system and practice(s) and ensure that they are providing equitable opportunities for all students.

Finally, I think it is time for educators to speak up without retribution; if there are less mandates and less red tape, I believe we can make a difference. My favorite statement from Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, (2008) "We need a self- actualized society...we need massive public investments in our children and schools" (p. 44). I

believe that one day not only will teachers' voices be heard but will be sought after—all things are possible!

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

I found the results of my study to have a positive impact on my students, however action research cannot be generalizable (Mertler, 2017). In addition, the time-period of seven weeks in addition to the sample size of 20 students may be improved by extending the action research study to a full semester and increasing the number of participants.

Finally, an additional limitation included my own bias by implementing a teacher-developed unit with a hybrid-approach may have impacted my interpretation of the study's results. Incorporating additional educators with this endeavor may also prove beneficial and give them insight into the pedagogical aspects of their teaching.

The possibility of creating teacher leadership teams within schools could have positive impacts. According to Ingersoll, et al. (2015) teacher leadership schools incorporate teachers working alongside of administration in making school-wide decisions. Historically, schools have maintained a hierarchical approach with principals and administrators making the school and classroom decisions. However, the consideration of teachers becoming more involved with these decisions could greatly impact their teaching and work (Ingersoll, 2015). From my perspective, I have reached the same conclusion that other educational researchers have, which is that teachers have a wealth of knowledge that is not tapped into due to the overarching system that keeps their voices silent. Imagine the positive impacts that all students could benefit from if every educational stakeholder welcomed and sustained teacher empowerment within school settings.

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Appendix A

Pre- and Posttest Assessment

The Pre- and Posttest followed the conclusion of the read aloud, *Charlotte's Web*.
Literary (Narrative) Elements in a 2nd Grade Classroom

Directions: Complete each question by writing the correct letter on the line.

1. The main character determines the way the _____ develops and is usually who will solve the problem the story centers upon.
a. setting b. character trait c. **plot** d. conflict
2. The location of the action is the _____ and the author describes the environment or the surroundings of the story in detail.
a. plot b. conflict c. **setting** d. resolution
3. The plot is centered on the way in which a character attempts to resolve a problem and is called the _____.
a. setting b. resolution c. exposition d. **conflict**
4. These are introduced to the reader and described in detail with enough information of their physical attributes and personality traits. The reader can visualize the _____ because of the author's descriptions.
a. setting b. plot c. **characters** d. traits
5. The _____ can change based on who is telling the story.
a. setting b. traits c. **point of view** d. motivation
6. Which of the following would be classified as a personality trait?
a. runt b. **crafty** c. fat d. lanky

Directions: Read the excerpt from *Charlotte's Web* below and complete the questions by circling the correct letter.

Charlotte stood quietly over the fly preparing to eat it. Wilbur lay down and closed his eyes. He was tired from his wakeful night and the excitement of meeting someone for the first time. A breeze brought him the smell of clover- the sweet-smelling world beyond his fence. "Well," he thought, "I've got a new friend all right! But what a gamble friendship is! Charlotte is fierce, brutal, scheming, bloodthirsty –everything I don't like. How can I learn to like her, even though she is pretty, and of course, clever?"

7. The above paragraph describes Charlotte's _____.

- a. role attribute b. **personality trait** c. appearance d. physical
8. These are all the events that lead up to the climax and build suspense (part of the plot structure).
- a. falling action b. **rising action** c. resolution d. setting
9. "Everything on the farm was dripping wet. The grass looked like a magic carpet. The asparagus patch looked like a silver forest."
- a. metaphor b. **simile** c. personification d. alliteration

Read the passage and circle the correct answer.

What does the passage below teach the reader?

10. Throughout each of these life and death situations, the foundation of the story is friendship. Fern's friendship and love towards Wilbur continuously saves him, while Charlotte's friendship, loyalty, and sacrifice for someone she cares about shows her and Wilbur's unwavering friendship. Wilbur then returns the favor in true friendship to ensure that Charlotte's eggs are safe until their birth.
- a. **theme** b. plot of the story c. conflict d. exposition

Appendix B

Pre- and Posttest Scores

Pretest and Posttest Scores from Treatment Group

Students	Pretest Score # correct out of 10	Posttest Score # correct out of 10
1	40%	50%
2	NA	NA
3	60%	30%
4	40%	40%
5	20%	100%
6	20%	60%
7	40%	80%
8	20%	90%
9	20%	80%
10	50%	60%
11	30%	90%
12	30%	20%
13	20%	70%
14	50%	70%
15	50%	40%
16	20%	70%
17	30%	90%
18	40%	90%
















19	60%	100%
20	50%	100%
21	50%	50% (oral administration before diagnosis)



















Pretest and Posttest Scores from Control Group

Students -Control	Pretest – Out of 10	Posttest % of 100
1	30%	50%
2	0%	50%
3	20%	30%
4	40%	40%
5	NA	NA
6	NA	NA
7	50%	0%
8	30%	40%
9	20%	10%
10	30%	20%
11	50%	60%
12	40%	50%
13	20%	40%
14	20%	40%
15	30%	20%
16	20%	30%
17	NA	NA
18	50%	40%
19	30%	50%
20	30%	60%
21	10%	30%

Appendix C

Student Perceptions Survey

Read each one below, and circle only one face that you agree with.	1 point. No, I don't get it. 	2 points. I'm still not sure if I get it. 	3 points. Yes, I get it! 
I know how to find the life lesson or theme in a fairy tale.			
I know what character traits are. (personality and physical)			
I understand how the main characters affect the plot.			
I know what the characters' feelings, thoughts, and actions do to the plot.			

I can write better vocabulary words and add them to my writing.			
I feel I could write a good story with a beginning, middle, and ending.			
I understand the different points of view (1 st person and 3 rd person).			
I feel I learn best with the whole group.			
I learn best in small group settings.			
I like the genre of fantasy (fairy tales).			

Appendix D

Writing Checklist for Fairy Tales

Name: _____ #: _____

Checklist for Writing "My Crazy Fairy Tale"

1. I have my exposition with the essential information about the characters and the setting. _____
2. I described the setting as enchanting or with royalty. I painted a picture with words, so the reader can visualize it _____
3. I have personality traits and physical attributes that describe the main character(s). _____
4. My fairy tale has good and evil characters in it. _____
5. I used a simile in my fairy tale. _____
6. There is a problem/conflict in the story. _____
7. My plot has at least three events in the rising action leading to the climax. _____
8. The fairy tale shows the main character attempting to resolve the problem in the falling action. _____
9. The fairy tale's resolution ends with a happy conclusion. _____
10. The theme of my fairy tale has a life lesson. _____

Appendix E

Student and Parent Consent for Study

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am participating in a University of South Carolina class entitled "Action Research for Teachers" during the months of February through April of 2019. We are learning to document the strategies that work in our classrooms. I have written a paper concerning the strategy of implementing literacy strategies through the genre of fairy tales and fictional narratives. Over the 6-8week period, students will learn literary elements that are aligned with our state standards. I will collect data to confirm that this process will improve student literacy achievement. I am not doing anything different in the class or with the students – the purpose of the action research is to find out whether the instructional method is effective. Your child will not be denied any instruction or benefits because of my inquiry.

One of the methods to gather data on this strategy is to distribute a written pretest and then posttest after the unit of study. The pre and posttests will focus on literary elements conducive to standards that are taught in second grade. Some of these standards included on the tests will include the characterization, plot, setting, and how characters react to events/problems. Students will complete a 10-12 multiple choice item and fill-in-the-blank test. Another method in action research will be student observations during classroom discussions.

Please be assured that confidentiality will be maintained, and your child and the school will not be identified by me in any way. The principal, Katherine Roberts, of Lakewood Elementary has approved this action research. Below is a place for you to sign your name informing me that you do **NOT** want your child to participate, to be returned by your student to me. *There is no need to return the letter or contact me if there are no objections.*

Sincerely,

Dina L. Crislip

2nd Grade Teacher

XXXXXX Elementary School

XXXXXX XXXX, SC

dcrislip@XXXXXXXXXXXXXschools.net

I do not grant my permission for the use of my child's ideas, schoolwork, or words in research conducted during the school year by the teacher, Mrs. Dina Crislip. I understand that if I do not grant permission, he/she will not be denied any educational opportunity.

Child's name: _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Date _____

Printed Parent/ Guardian Name: _____ Date _____

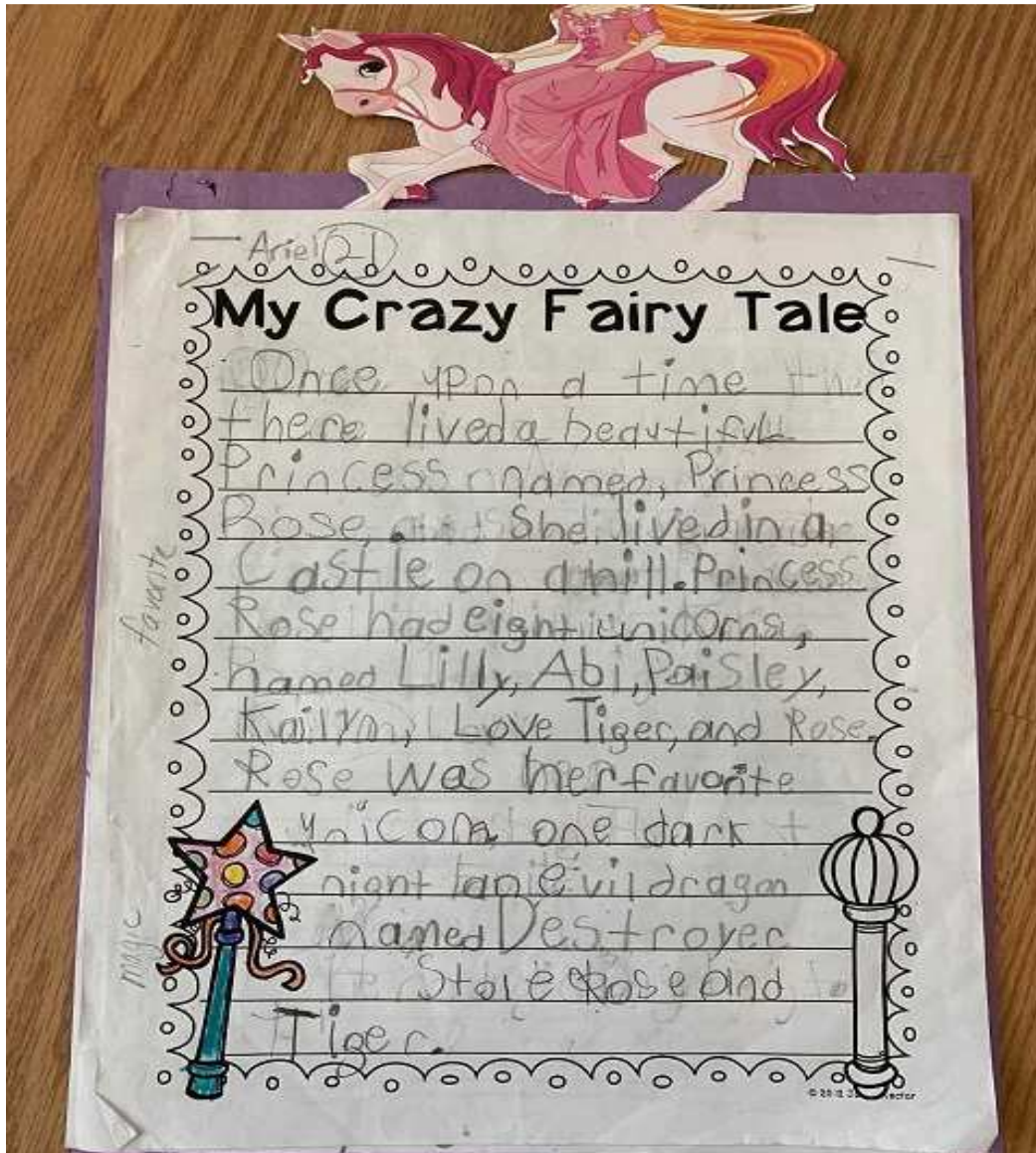
Appendix F

Fairy Tales from Treatment Group



Appendix G

Ariel's Fairy Tale



Appendix H

Plot Line Treatments

